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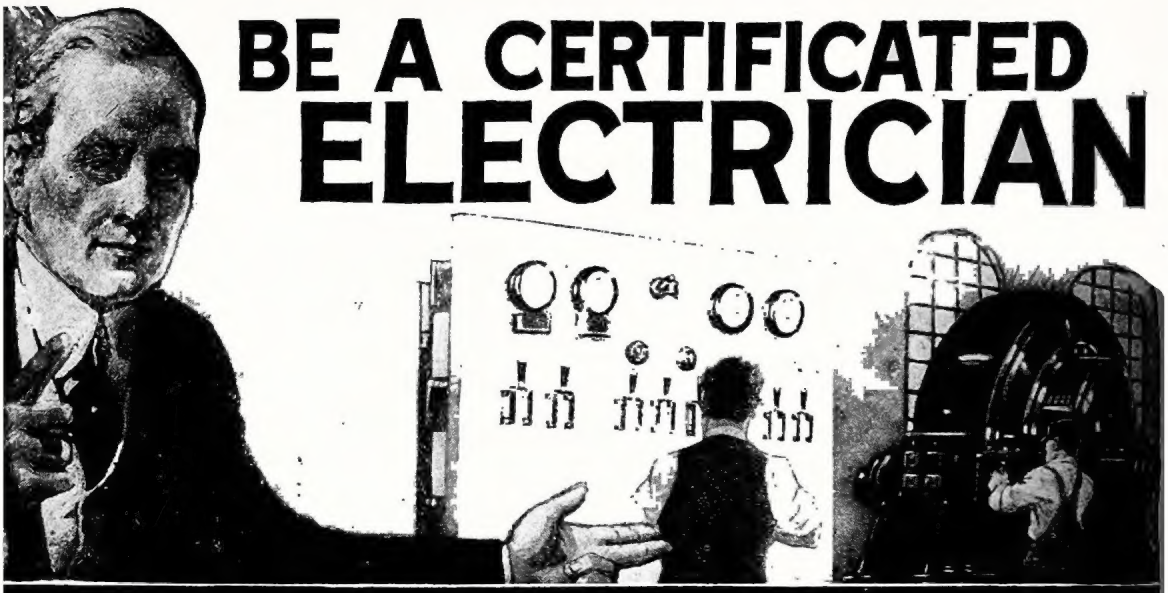

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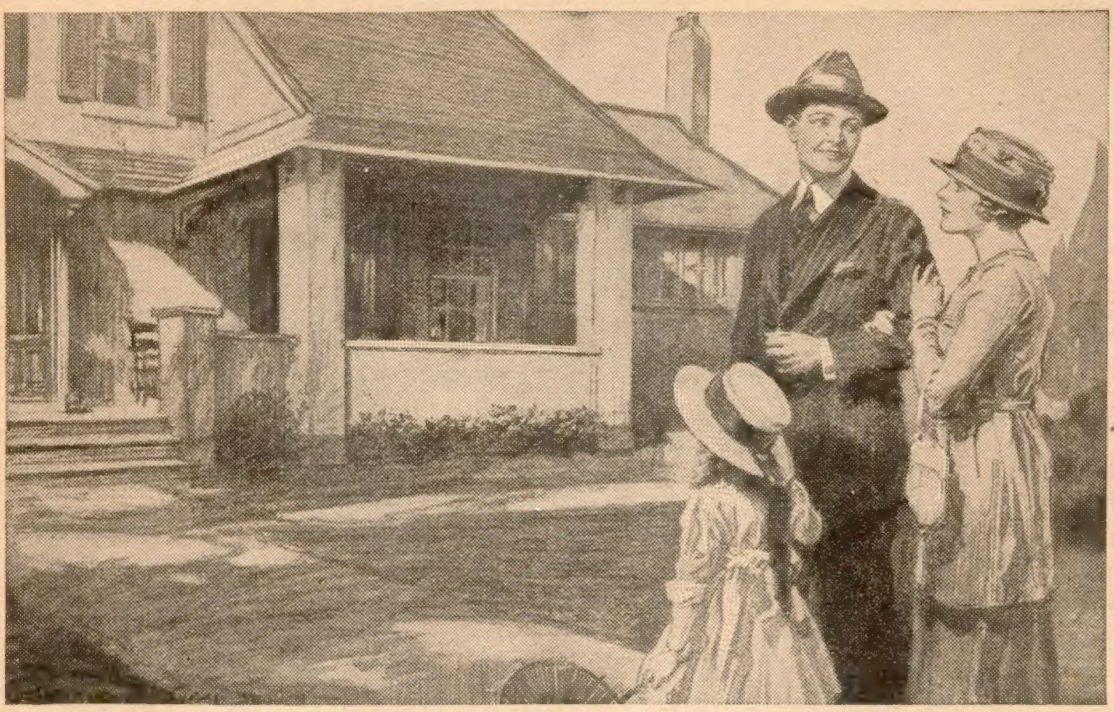

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ADVENTURE
Dec. 3rd, 1920

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Volume 27
Number 5

A Startling Memory Feat That You Can Do

How I learned the secret in one evening. It has helped me every day

WHEN my old friend Faulkner invited me to a dinner party at his house, I little thought it would be the direct means of getting me a one-hundred-and-fifty per cent. increase in salary. Yet it was, and here is the way it all came about.

Toward the close of the evening things began to drag a bit, as they often do at parties. Finally some one suggested the old idea of having everyone do a "stunt." Some sang, others forced weird sounds out of the piano, recited, told stories, and so on.

Then it came to Macdonald's turn. He was a quiet sort of chap, with an air about him that reminded one of the old saying that "still waters run deep." He said he had a simple "stunt" which he hoped we would like. He selected me to assist him. First he asked to be blindfolded securely to prove there was no trickery in it. Those present were to call out twenty-five numbers of three figures each, such as 161, 249, and so on. He asked me to write down the numbers as they were called.

This was done. Macdonald then astounded everyone by repeating the entire list of twenty-five numbers backwards and forwards. Then he asked people to request numbers by positions, such as the eighth number called, the fourth number, and so on. Instantly he repeated back the exact number in the position called. He did this with the entire list—over and over again, without making a single mistake.

Then Macdonald asked that a deck of cards be shuffled and called out to him in their order. This was done. Still blindfolded, he instantly named the cards in their order backwards and forwards. And then to further amaze us he gave us the number of any card counting from the top, or the card for any number.

You may well imagine our amazement at Macdonald's remarkable feat. You naturally expect to see a thing of this sort on the stage, and even then you look upon it as a trick. But to see it done by an everyday business man, in plain view of everyone, blindfolded and under conditions which make trickery impossible, is astonishing, to say the least.

* * * * * *

ON the way home that night I asked Macdonald how it was done. He said there was really nothing to it—simply a memory feat, the key to which anyone could easily learn in one evening. Then he told me that the reason most people have bad memories is because they leave memory development to chance. Anyone could do what he had done, and develop a good memory, he said, by following a few simple rules. And then he told me exactly how to do it. At the time I little thought that evening would prove to be one of the most eventful in my life, but such it proved to be.

What Macdonald told me I took to heart. In one evening I made remarkable strides toward improving my memory and it was but a question of days before I learned to do exactly what he had done.

At first I amused myself with my new-found ability by amazing people at parties. My "memory feat," as my friends called it, surely made a hit. Everyone was talking about it, and I was showered with invitations for all sorts of affairs. If anyone were to ask me how quickly to develop social popularity, I would tell him to learn my memory "feat"—but that is apart from what I want to tell you.

The most gratifying thing about the improvement of my memory was the remarkable way it helped me in business. Much to my surprise I discovered that my memory training had literally put a razor edge on my brain. My brain had become clearer, quicker, keener. I felt that I was fast acquiring that mental grasp and alertness I had so often admired in men who were spoken of as "wonders" and "geniuses."

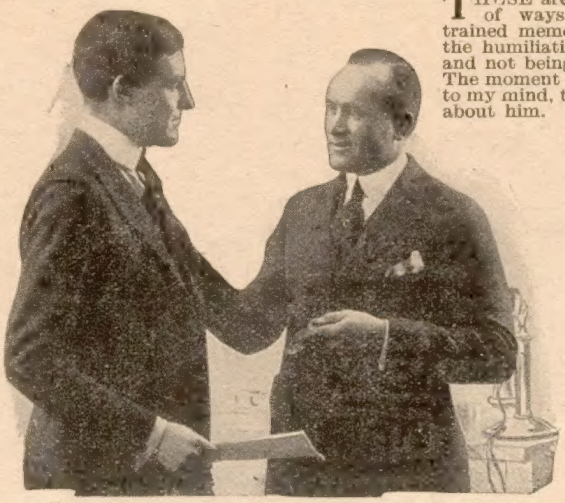
The next thing I noticed was a marked improvement in my conversational powers. Formerly my talk was halting and disconnected. I never could think of things to say until the conversation was over. And then, when it was too late, I would always think of apt and striking things I "might have said." But now I can think like a flash. When I am talking I never have to hesitate for the right word, the right expression or the right thing to say. It seems that all I have to do is to start to talk and instantly I find myself saying the very thing I want to say to make the greatest impression on people.

It wasn't long before my new-found ability to remember things and to say the right thing at the right time, attracted the attention of our president. He got in the habit of calling me in whenever he wanted facts about the business. As he expressed himself to me, "You can always tell me instantly what I want to know, while the other fellows annoy me by dodging out of the office and saying, 'I'll look it up.'"

* * * * * *

I FOUND that my ability to remember helped me wonderfully in dealing with other people, particularly in committee meetings. When a discussion opens up the man who can back up his statements quickly with a string of definite facts and figures usually dominates the others. Time and time again I have won people to my way of thinking simply because I could instantly recall facts and figures. While I'm proud of my triumphs in this respect, I often feel sorry for the ill-at-ease look of other men who cannot hold up their end in the argument because they cannot recall facts instantly. It seems as though I never forget anything. Every fact I now put in my mind is as clear and as easy to recall instantly as though it were written before me in plain black and white.

We all hear a lot about the importance of sound judgment. People who ought to know say that a man cannot begin to exercise sound judgment until he is forty to fifty years of age. But I have disproved all that. I have found that sound judgment is nothing more than the ability to weigh and judge facts in their relation to each other. Memory is the basis of sound judgment. I am only thirty-two, but many times I have been complimented on having the judgment of a man of forty-five. I take no personal credit for this—it is all due to the way I trained my memory.



"Our president complimented me on always being able to tell instantly facts he wanted to know."

* * * * * *

THESE are only a few of the hundreds of ways I have profited by my trained memory. No longer do I suffer the humiliation of meeting men I know and not being able to recall their names. The moment I see a man his name flashes to my mind, together with a string of facts about him. I always liked to read, but usually forgot most of it. Now I find it easy to recall what I have read. Another surprising thing is that I can now master a subject in considerably less time than before. Price lists, market quotations, data of all kinds, I can recall in detail almost at will. I rarely make a mistake.

My vocabulary, too, has increased wonderfully. Whenever I see a striking word or expression, I memorize it and use it in my dictation or conversation. This has put a remarkable sparkle and pulling power into my conversation and business letters. And the remarkable part of it all is that I can now do my day's work quicker and with much less effort, simply because my mind works like a flash and I do not have to keep stopping to look things up.

All this is extremely satisfying to me, of course. But the best part of it all is that since my memory powers first attracted the attention of our president, my salary has steadily been increased. Today it is many times greater than it was the day Macdonald got me interested in improving my memory.

* * * * * *

WHAT Macdonald told me that eventful evening was this: "Get the Roth Memory Course." I did. That is how I learned to do all the remarkable things I have told you about. The publishers of the Roth Memory Course—the Independent Corporation—are so confident that it will also show you how to develop a remarkable memory that they will gladly send the Course to you on approval.

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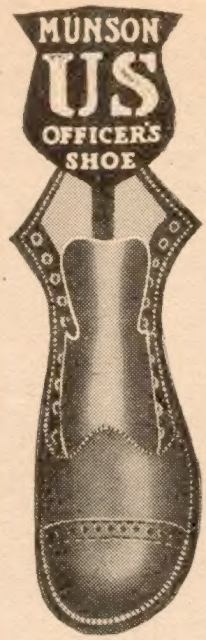

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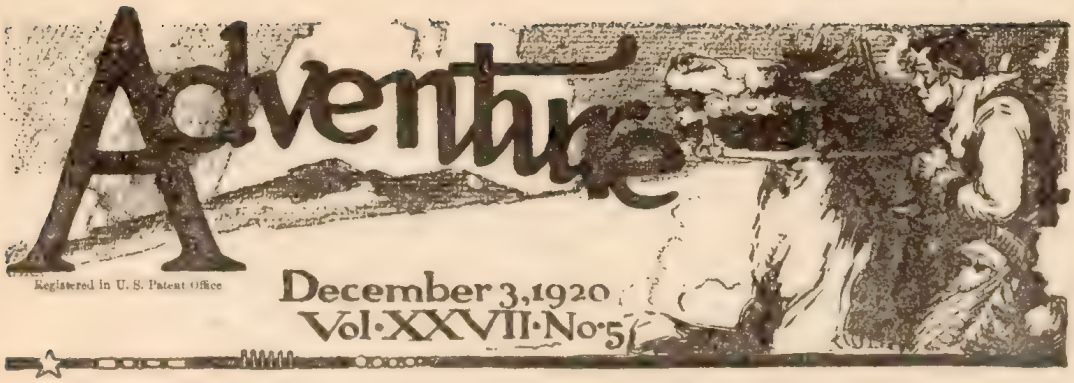

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

HOW the Dane, *Gorvhalsen*, sailed from Honolulu in quest of the lost gold of "*Hurricane*" *Williams;* how *McGuire* and *Brundage* sailed with him in the days when mutiny and piracy were rife in the South Seas. STORM ROVERS—a complete novel by Gordon Young in the next issue.

Other stories in the Mid-December Adventure *are described on the last page of this issue.*

Author of "Queen of the Hills," "The Trails of Silence, etc.

LANG RUSH pulled up his mount as he topped a rise of ground and stared out over a vast open country which reached from the Teton River in the south to the Sweetgrass Hills near the Canadian boundary in the north. Forty miles in the west the Rockies reared their jagged outlines against the sky, and to the eastward, nearly the same distance, appeared a low-lying series of buttes known as The Knees.

In all directions the virgin prairie stretched in long, rolling undulations, covered with sear bunch-grass, dotted pretty generally with the small, unpainted shacks of the homesteaders who had come in to crowd the range and edge the great herds slowly southward toward the Musselshell. Here and there the far-flung domain was scarred for the first time with tight-strung barbed wire, and there were little patches of green showing against the brown grass, marking where the vanguard of agriculture was putting its faith in dry-farmed crops.

But Lang Rush seemingly was not interested in the inspiring scene of a new country in the making. His glances searched the skies. High above the Rockies, then to the north, south, and east he looked, pulling down the broad brim of his high-crowned hat to shade his eyes from the glare of the sun.

"Not a cloud in sight," he said aloud in evident disappointment. "And not a drop of rain in two long months."

Again he gazed at the far-flung horizon and then his look froze on the little cluster of buildings seven miles in the west which marked the sight of Bradley, a mushroom prairie town which had sprung up on the heels of the influx of homesteaders.

He put spurs to his horse and rode for more than an hour along a lane between new barbed wire. The green patches increased close to the town, and finally he stopped in a cloud of dust before a small building in the center of town and dismounted. He entered the building, across the front of which was painted in huge letters—

BRADLEY STATE BANK

He approached the single caged counter and inquired—

"Is Mr. Ferguson in?"

"He's in the rear office, Mr. Rush; go right in," was the respectful reply.

Rush opened a door at the farther end of the counter and entered a small room. A large man, florid of face, with bushy eyebrows and mustache, looked up from a roll-top desk and greeted Rush with a curt, "Good morning."

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"I called about that notice you sent saying as how that last note for a thousand is due," said Rush, removing his hat.

The man at the desk motioned him to a chair.

"Your note isn't due until Friday, and this is Tuesday," he said. "Did you want to pay it today?"

Lang Rush laughed softly—a musical, chuckling laugh.

"I'm afraid I'll have to ask for a renewal on that, Mr. Ferguson," he said as he seated himself. "I thought I might as well come down and have it over with today."

Ferguson frowned, laid down his pen and straightened back in his chair.

"We're calling in our loans, Rush; money is tight—awful tight."

"No one knows that any better than I do," Rush replied with a puckering crease in his forehead. "I've got five hands to pay out there on my ranch and those men want the cash. For assets I've got some farm implements and a safe full of options on deeded land that aren't worth a penny until I find a buyer, and——"

"The buyers have stopped coming," interrupted Ferguson.

"Just now there's a lull, I'll admit," said Rush. "But they'll start coming again before long."

"Not for two years," declared the banker.

"Two years!" exclaimed Rush. "What makes you think that, Mr. Ferguson?"

"Because this drought is general all over the Northwest," said the banker. "It extends into the Dakotas and Minnesota; it's burning up the Palouse country in Washington where a lot of our buyers were coming from, and it has hit Canada hard. With things in bad shape at home prospective land-buyers are not going to a country that is even drier to invest; and if they did they would want rock-bottom prices 'way under the figures that you've got your options at."

"But the homesteaders——"

"Aren't worth thinking about, and that's the plain truth. The first crop of settlers in a new country ordinarily isn't worth its salt as a rule except for the work of improvement that it does. It's the men who have money—the experienced farmers—who come in after the homesteads have been proved up on and who want deeded land, who bring capital and prosperity into the country.

"Believe me, Rush, I know. I've been figuring ten years ahead in starting this bank here. Some day this will be a good live town and this will be a prosperous farming community; but it is several years off. No, with conditions as they are I can not renew this note, nor your other notes when they become due."

The banker gazed not unkindly at the well-built, good-looking young fellow with a face and hands bronzed to the color of his hair who sat opposite him.

"I'll admit it did look good in the Spring," resumed the banker. "The homesteaders were coming in fast and you were getting fifty to a hundred dollars a throw locating them; and there were land-buyers, too. But this dry spell has changed everything. Here it is June—the month when we usually get our heaviest rainfall—and we haven't had a drop. The wheat ain't a foot high. How's yours?"

"Needs water," answered Rush shortly.

"If it don't rain within a week the grain hereabouts won't be worth cutting for hay," said the banker. "And if these homesteaders don't get a crop they won't have a dollar to their name. Most of 'em haven't got a dollar now but are living on prospects. I'll tell you, we'll remember this drought for a long, long time, Rush; you mark my words."

"I guess that's so," agreed Rush, looking out the little window at the parched fields.

"Of course there's one consolation. It only takes one crop in this country to offset two failures; but the most of these newcomers are farming on a mighty small scale—just enough land in cultivation to prove up by. Isn't that so?"

"That's so."

"How much you got in?"

"Two hundred acres."

"That's a big piece in comparison to what some's got," considered the banker. "All wheat?"

"Wheat and oats, and I'm trying out some Winter barley."

"And it needs water pretty bad, eh?"

"If I don't have water in a few days I won't harvest a bushel. But it's bound to rain; it always rains in June; wouldn't surprize me if it started raining any day."

"If it rains in time to save your crop, or even half of it, you can have your notes extended," said the banker. "But if it don't rain I've got to foreclose to protect myself.

"I have no alternative, Rush; can't you see that? The fellows who are in with me are putting on the screws. We were all excited last Spring and we went in too deep. We've got to call in these loans because the security we have is being discounted with every new dry day; and that's the truth."

"All right, Mr. Ferguson; we'll pray for rain," said Rush as he rose from his chair, stern-faced, and made his way out of the bank.

HE PROCEEDED straight to the little combination hotel, restaurant and saloon owned by Hal Grimes. He found Grimes behind his bar.

"Hal," said Rush in a faltering voice, "I—

if I remember right—I let you have a little bit of money early this Spring when you was first opening up. There wasn't nothing said about when it should be paid back, but I was wondering if— I don't like to ask anybody for money, Hal, but——"

"Enough of that," said Grimes heartily. "I can see by the way you're actin' that you need change, an' you can have that bit right now an' much obleeged for the favor, Lang. Three hundred, wasn't it?"

Rush nodded.

Grimes drew a thick wallet from a hip pocket and counted out three hundred in bills.

"The bar's been making a little money, but I don't know what it's goin' to be if this dry spell keeps up."

"Just keep going somehow for a year or so and you'll make out and make out big," said Rush encouragingly. "This is the coming country, Hal; mark what I tell you—drought or no drought."

"Well I hope so," observed Grimes doubtfully. "Have a little drink, Lang? You look kinda down in the mouth; better take a little snort to cheer you up."

Rush hesitated. He was afraid of liquor. He remembered what it had done to his father, and knew that the taste for it was in his blood.

He longed for the solace of the stimulant; he yearned to forget the weight upon his mind for a brief spell; but he was afraid of the consequences—consequences of which he could form but a vague idea.

"No, I guess I'll wait a few days," he laughed as he waved aside the proffered drink. "But if it don't rain in a week or so, Hal, I'll be danged if I ain't coming in an' get rip, rearin', roarin' pie-eyed and see if it won't change my luck!"

I

THREE days afterward the complexion of the whole situation changed. The great blue arch of the heavens continued cloudless while a dry moon rode the star-splashed skies at night. And then came the hot winds, fiery breaths as if from a furnace, blowing across the open country, wilting and shriveling the thirsty crops, drying up the few scattered prairie lakes, leaving hopeless desolation in their wake.

Even the shingles on the homestead shacks curled up like dried leaves. Wheat, oats, and barley, blunted and stinted, ripened prematurely with empty heads. All promise of any return, regardless of how meager, from that year's cultivation was within a few hours dissipated.

Lang Rush looked grimly out over his fields. The stand of grain would hardly pay to be cut for hay. The labor and money invested in the crop were a total loss. He had no funds with which to buy seed and put in fresh crops of Winter wheat to mature the next year. He had taken a chance on the three hundred and twenty acres which he had inherited; taken a long chance and—lost!

He shook his fist in the face of the hot wind.

"Had to take it all!" he cried harshly to the simmering heat waves. "The whole chunk at one crack."

That afternoon he called his men into the front room of his little ranch-house which he used as an office.

"I'll pay you fellows off and let you go," he said quietly. "There's nothing to do here now."

There was no complaint at this, for the men had expected it. Most of them were homesteaders who were thankful for the chance they had had to make money that Spring. It would help to tide them over the long Winter that now would have to ensue before any of them could hope for a crop on his own place.

When Rush had finished paying his men he had about a hundred dollars left.

One of the men offered to buy a seeder if he could get it at a reasonable price.

"That is, if you're figuring on quitting farming, like you was hinting," explained the man.

"Everything is mortgaged to the hilt," smiled Rush wearily. "I couldn't sell an empty sack outa the oat-bin. Everything I had has rode away on those winds, except the options in that little safe; an' they're not worth the paper they're written on—now. But if we had had a good year——"

A painful look came into his eyes, showing that he felt his disappointment keenly. And to have failure come about through no fault of his! If the season had been normal and the June rains had materialized as had been usual he would have realized thousands of dollars from his crops. The options in the little safe would have yielded him from one to ten dollars an acre on the deeded properties they covered. Now they were worthless. A fortune had failed his grasp because the rains had been withheld.

"No wonder dad said this was a forsaken country and never meant for farming!" exclaimed the youth. "No wonder the coming of the sheep and then their going broke his heart. No wonder he took to drinking.

"He wasn't intended for farming and neither was I. The Rush outfit has always been an open-range outfit, an' now I'm the last Rush left an' I'm a-goin' to *keep* it that way!"

He followed the men to the corrals and watched silently while they got their few belongings from the improvised bunk-house near the barn and saddled their horses. They disappeared in several directions toward their homesteads and Lang Rush was left alone.

He turned out the horses, with the exception

of his saddle mount, a rangy, sure-footed cow-pony, dark bay in color, named Dandy. Then he went to the house, took some papers from the little safe and crammed them into his coat pockets. He locked the doors and stood for a time on the little front stoop looking toward The Knees, which wavered in blue outlines in the heat.

But Lang was not the sort to spend much time bemoaning his ill luck. He would forget it in action. He ran down to the corrals and flung the saddle on Dandy. In a moment he had cinched it and tied a yellow slicker on behind.

"Slim chance to have any use for you," he addressed the oiled slicker; and then he laughed.

The reaction from his worry and brooding had begun to set in now that all hope had been lost. From a peg in the barn Lang took down his gun and cartridge-belt.

"This is still a long, long ways from bein' a tame country," he observed aloud as he spun the cylinder of his forty-five and slipped in the loads. "I guess a man can find trouble if he wants it, an' I sure need a little now for what ails me."

He leaped into the saddle and started at a fast pace for Bradley, eleven miles away. It was late afternoon when he dismounted in the dust of the little main street and tied his horse.

He went first to the bank.

"See what you can make out of them," he said to Ferguson the banker as he dropped the papers upon the desk in the inner office. "There's my options and a list of the stuff out on the ranch; maybe your crowd'll lump what I owe you in the mortgage on my place. The hot winds have fixed things for fair—put us all in the same boat. Do what you can and I'll be satisfied."

"I'll see what can be done," said the banker; but his tone was far from encouraging.

Lang left the bank with a quick step. He slung himself back into the saddle and rode to a livery barn on a back street.

"Put him up, Joe, until I need him again," he told the boy temporarily in charge.

Leaving the barn, Lang walked back to Main Street. Clouds of dust, gathered and propelled by the scorching winds, were whirling along the roads leading into town. Lang hesitated but a moment and then turned toward Hal Grimes' saloon.

II

A WILD burst of laughter came from a little group before the bar as Lang entered. But what attracted Lang's attention most was the typical cow-puncher attire of the men—chaps and spurs, leather cuffs embellished with silver buttons, blue and red bandannas that hung low on their breasts, knotted behind. Beneath their coats he caught sight of cartridge-belts and guns. These men were not homesteaders.

One of the men was speaking in a loud, boisterous voice.

"This'll teach 'em a lesson," he roared. "Let 'em have a good taste of drought an' they'll clear out an' leave this country fer cattle an' sheep, which is all it's fit fer; eh, now?"

He banged a great fist on the bar with a force which made the glasses jump. Then he caught sight of Lang.

"Welcome, old-timer; have a little snort?" he invited.

Lang's decision wavered. He was afraid of drink; but he wanted excitement, and he wanted to forget the burned fields and his ruined prospects. He wanted a temporary counter-irritant to offset the worry and fill in the interval while he was deciding upon the best method of getting a new start.

He nodded to Hall Grimes, who promptly set out a bottle and glasses.

The man who had invited him to drink took up a position beside him.

"These winds'll fix 'em," continued the man. "They're startin' to get out already. Comin' in with their little bundles to beat it back to Iowa to papa's farm where they belong."

Lang's eyes glinted as he raised his glass.

"Here's a go," he said; "but go slow on the papa's-farm talk. Some of us staked everything we had on this deal."

Several of the men looked at him with new interest but the man who appeared to be the leader barely nodded.

"And it ain't hardly been a square deal," said this man in lower tones, "to have the rain hold off like this; tough luck I call it."

The liquor seemed to fill some vague, craving need in Lang's mind. He ordered another drink, including all present in his invitation, and soon he was one with the group, laughing, singing, talking.

But the talk now was not of crops or farming, but of the open range—the range that Lang had known and loved in his youth before the death of his mother, and later of his father.

"The old days—the good old ridin' days—are comin' back," thundered the leader of the men with whom Lang Rush was drinking.

Deep down in his heart Lang knew that this wasn't true; he knew the open range was doomed; but the bold statement thrilled him just the same.

"I hope so," he said in spite of his conviction to the contrary.

"Well now them's good words to hear comin' from a Rush, partner," said the leader of the convivial party. "Come on in this back room a minute while you and I have a little talk, will yer?"

Lang, his brain afire with the liquor he had

taken, willingly agreed and went into the rear room with the man. Grimes put a bottle and glasses on the table between them, and when he had withdrawn and closed the door the man leaned across the table and touched Lang on the arm.

"Suppose you was surprized I knew you? I knew yore father, too, my boy; knew him well. Hemp's my name—maybe you've heered of me."

Lang was startled. Hemp's reputation was none too savory, even back in the days when reputations were not things to be inquired into too closely. Hemp back in the Teton country?

"You've had a lot of tough luck," Hemp was saying; "and it ain't been yore fault. These —— homesteaders who want to gobble up this country are jest sp'ilin' it fer legitimate cattle and sheep business. An' you caught the fever and staked your pile an' lost. I know. An' it ain't right.

"Yore daddy lost a lot of good money in here when they cut his range down so he couldn't make good after that last bad Winter. Ain't it so?"

Lang nodded. It was true that the limiting of the range had resulted in disaster for his father.

"Wal now, you've got something comin' to you, Rush. It ain't right you should be broke and stand to lose everything when a few thousand would set you right an' help you to put in a little stock later on."

"A few thousand?" repeated Lang in a thick voice.

"Sure—five or maybe ten, maybe more," was the mysterious rejoinder. "That'd help some, wouldn't it?"

Lang's eyes glowed brightly in the dusk.

"There's a way of getting it," said Hemp, pouring out two generous drinks.

Lang downed his liquor in a gulp.

"What're you gettin' at, Hemp? Put your cards down on the table so I can get a slant at the game."

"Wal now, look here. Yo're a good rider fer I've seen you stick on a horse like you was glued there; yo're a dead shot from any angle, an' you shore know the country; an' that counts. Suppose you put in with me an' my gang on a little deal."

"What sort of a deal, Hemp?"

"We was figuring on——"

Hemp paused abruptly as some one rapped on the door. He leaped from his chair with his right hand under his coat as he gave the word to enter. It was Grimes with a lamp.

"I'm gettin' a bunch together I kin depend on," said Hemp when Grimes had placed the lamp on the table and left. "I've got three now that seem jake; two others I'm goin' to shake because I ain't sure of 'em; but I'd be willin' to take a chance on you any day."

"Must be peculiar sort of business you've got in mind if a man has to be able to ride an' shoot an' know the country," said Lang with a half-drawl.

"Peculiar and profitable," said Hemp as he poured out another drink; "and—and maybe dangerous. Just how dangerous depends on the men; that's why I aim to be careful."

While the two men looked into each other's eyes a face appeared for a moment at the single window. It was a freckled face, marked by dissipation, with shifty eyes, gray-blue and piercing, but somewhat blurred by drink. The mouth seemed curled in a half-sneer, and over the left eyebrow was a jagged scar. The shifty eyes regarded the two men curiously for a long moment and then the face disappeared.

"An' what sort of trick did you say it was?" asked Lang.

"Banks!" whispered Hemp hoarsely. "They've sprung up all over the prairie country; there's one in every new little town; an' every one of 'em has got some money if it ain't much. There ain't so much wire fence strung yet that a live bunch can't make a getaway after pullin' a job; an' I know the Missouri bad lands—they could hunt us fer years there an' never get close to us. In three months we can clean up enough so we don't need to care if it ever rains, snows, or blows a gale ag'in."

III

LANG RUSH poured himself a drink when the man Hemp had ceased speaking but he did not vouchsafe any comment on the proposition which had been made to him.

Hemp evidently regarded this silence as favorable.

"Take a little while to think it over," he said to Rush. "You ain't takin' much chance; they'd never suspect you, an' you can get back what you've lost an' more. Yo're entitled to it. Let's go out an' join the boys and you give me yore answer, say, in a hour."

Rush followed him out and the two joined the others at the bar. Lang noticed that Hemp had five men with him; but he could not recollect ever having seen any of them before.

After another round at the bar he went into the restaurant in an adjoining room and ate a hurried supper. He was feeling the effects of the liquor and he wanted to steady himself.

While he was eating Grimes came in and paused at Lang's table.

"Know that bunch in there?" he asked in a low voice, indicating the bar with a thumb.

"Can't say as I do," answered Lang.

"Look like tough customers," said Grimes. "I've seen that feller what was talkin' to you in the back room somewheres, but can't place him."

Lang was busy thinking and had no answer for this.

"I wouldn't want to see you get into any kind of a mess jest because you been takin' on a few," began Grimes, hesitatingly. "But I-——"

"Grimes, let me look out for myself, will you?" interrupted Lang, who plainly was irritated.

"Sure; I guess you kin do it," replied Grimes as he went into the kitchen before returning to the bar.

When Lang had finished he sauntered casually back into the saloon. Several of the men had gone out and only Hemp and two others remained. Lang waved back the drink offered him.

"Too soon after supper," he explained.

"Been doin' some thinking?" asked Hemp with a wink.

"You've guessed it," replied Lang with a cold sparkle in his eyes.

"That's the stuff," approved Hemp, grinning. "I played you for a man with sense."

He leaned close to Lang's ear and spoke next in an undertone.

"Got that answer thought up?"

"You bet," said Lang crisply.

"What is it?" demanded Hemp cautiously.

"Here it is," sang Lang as he shot a lean, brown fist with all the power in his supple body to Hemp's jaw.

Hemp went to the floor with a crash; but even as he fell there was a glint of metal in his right hand.

Lang's weapon spoke first and the other's gun was sent spinning from his hand by the crashing impact of a bullet.

"Don't put that light out!" Lang warned Grimes as he faced Hemp's two companions.

The men had been too much startled by Lang's sudden attack to come quickly to the aid of their leader. Now hey raised their hands because Lang's gun covered them.

Lang kicked Hemp's gun across the floor well out of reach and then relieved the pair of their weapons. He threw the three revolvers over the bar and then spoke directly to Hemp, who had risen with his hands above is head and his face livid with rage.

"I can find plenty of excitement beside the kind you've got to offer, Hemp; an' I ain't lookin' to make any money your way. I expect you'll be on my trail for this, but watch out you don't step in a badger-hole an' find me in it."

Hemp made no reply while Lang backed slowly to the door; but his eyes were flashing red with anger.

"So long," said Lang cheerfully as he disappeared into the night.

He ran to the livery barn and quickly saddled his horse, giving the man a dollar for his feed. In another minute he was loping easily south of town on the trail to the river. He listened and soon laughed softly to himself as he heard the dull thundering echo of hoofbeats on the trail toward his ranch and The Knees.

"I thought so," he said aloud while Dandy pricked his ears. "And when they find I'm not on that trail they'll hit for the river to hang out till they think the time's right for the first job. In town to get the lay of the land, eh? And I'll be Johnny on the spot when they show up."

He rode on under the stars. The wind had abated with the twilight and he enjoyed the cool of the night. Now that he no longer had occasion to search the skies for signs of rain—now that nothing much mattered—he again keenly sensed the soft beauty of the wide prairie country.

He felt a new sense of freedom, wildly exhilarating. And in his blood was the irresistible urge for action; for Lang Rush was range-born and bred.

Mile after mile he rode and finally he made out the lights of a little town in a dip of the prairie beyond a black band of deeper shadows which he knew marked the willows and cottonwoods along the river-banks.

When he c me to the Teton he halted on the brink above the slow-moving water. He unsaddled his horse and turned him loose to graze. Dandy would not stray beyond the range of a whistle-call, Lang knew. Then, using the saddle for a pillow and the yellow slicker to roll up in, Lang lay down upon the soft bunchgrass under the yellow stars and the pale, weird beauty of the Montana night, and slept.

MEANWHILE Hal Grimes was regarding a deserted barroom with a great deal of perplexity. His strange guests had left as soon as Lang had taken his departure.

Grimes had handed back the three guns because he could think of no legitimate reason for refusing Nor did he believe the men would fail to get them if he did refuse to give them up. He didn't know what the trouble had been about. And he was too wise to ask.

And now another stranger entered the saloon—a comparatively young man with a freckled face marked by dissipation, shifty eyes, and a scar over the left eyebrow.

"What's chances to get a drink?" asked the newcomer in a husky voice.

"Name?" queried Grimes, looking the man over in disapproval.

"Burt Condon," was the answer.

"Broke?"

"If drinks was selling at a cent apiece——"

"I know; never mind," said Grimes, setting a bottle and glass on the bar. "Any man can get one drink from me; an' if he's got a good enough reason he can get two or maybe three—but that's the limit."

Condon's hand shook as he poured a glass full of liquor and tossed it off eagerly. He put down the empty glass with trembling fingers and looked askance at Grimes.

"Oh, go ahead an' take another; I don't know what I'm doin' tonight anyway," said the saloonkeeper. "Where'd you hail from?"

"Milk River," said Condon, availing himself of the invitation without delay.

"Milk River, eh? 'Way up north. What was you doin' up there?"

"Homesteadin', but couldn't make it go. Free land! That caught me! But makin' a livin' on it's another thing after you get it—unless you've got money."

"So it is, so it is," agreed Grimes. "Went broke, eh? Where'd you come from there?"

"Illinois," said Condon uneasily.

"Been riding the line ever since, eh? Where you headed for?"

"Great Falls. There oughta be work down there. Say, who was that lean sort of chap who was in here a while ago—the one who was sittin' in the back room with the fellow with the mustache?"

"You must mean Lang Rush; what d'ye know about him?"

"Nothin'; just wonderin' who he was. He wasn't in very good company, I'd say."

"Look here, what d'ye mean by that?" demanded Grimes sternly.

"Nothin'," said Condon sullenly; "only that fellow with the mustache was pointed out to me as a horse-thief up in Conrad."

"What's his name?" asked Grimes, interested.

"Didn't hear," replied Condon; "and didn't think to ask. Well, I'll be hitting the trail. Much obliged for your treat."

Condon left before Grimes could ask more questions. He untied his horse from the hitching-rail in front of a store and started south. He left the town behind and followed the trail toward the river.

IV

WHEN Lang awoke in the morning he once more felt the heartache of failure. Hitherto he had arisen with fresh hope every dawn to look out at the skies in search of telltale rain-clouds; but this new day he had not even that consolation. No rain, however generous or lasting, now could save the crops.

The wind was blowing up with the sun again. Had he lost his ranch? He ground his teeth when he thought of the money he had borrowed to put into tempting land options.

"Staked it all and lost," he cried savagely as he whistled for Dandy.

When he had saddled the horse he led him along the bank to a likely place for fording the river. Here he swung into the saddle and turned the animal into the stream. The water was barely two feet deep, thus attesting to the severity of the drought.

On the farther bank he paused to look out over the long prairie country toward The Knees and home. Lang always had loved this country, but his father had preferred the range farther east. When his father had died five years before, and his affairs finally had been adjusted, Lang was left with nothing but the small ranch, almost bare of improvements.

He whirled Dandy about and started at a wild lope in the cool dawn toward the town, which lay in a dip of the prairie a few miles southwest. This town was named Muddy, taking its monicker from a creek which flowed through it from the Gumbo Flats called Muddy Creek.

As Lang rode down over the rim in the big dip in the plain he casually noted another rider approaching the town from the east. This man apparently had ridden hard, for even at that distance his horse showed unmistakable signs of being spent. Lang absorbed these details by force of habit acquired in long years on the range and not because he felt any interest in the rider.

Lang proceeded at once to the little Blue Front saloon and restaurant which not only was one of the best appearing of the few buildings in Muddy but also the common meeting-place for vistors. Here he ate a big portion of ham and eggs and drank two cups of strong, black coffee.

He looked into the bar and then made the rounds of the other buildings. He was looking for a man who once had been employed by his father and whom he had expected to find in Muddy. But he could find no trace of him, nor could he obtain any word as to his whereabouts.

"Another wild-goose chase," he told a man in the livery barn; "and I guess we can't expect anything to come right this year. Lem Robbins worked for my dad for years, an' I'd like to meet up with him today. We might be able to frame up a little deal."

The man looked at him curiously.

"Lem don't come in here much any more," he drawled. "Guess he don't like it much around here lately."

"Well, I can't say as I blame him," said Lang. "He never was a farming man."

There was a trace of bitterness in Lang's tone, and again the man looked at him sharply but remained silent.

With nothing else to do Lang turned into the Blue Front saloon. A sense of loneliness was upon him. The forced inactivity which the immediate future seemed to promise was maddening.

He ordered a drink. As he raised his glass

he looked into the big mirror behind the bar and there glimpsed the features of a man who was standing beside him, also drinking and speaking.

"I've had a tough ride, Jerry—" this apparently to the bartender—"an' I want a couple of right smart bracers afore I get me a cup o' caffy."

Lang finished his drink in a welcome glow of excitement. He had recognized the man beside him as one of Hemp's companions of the night before; very likely this was the rider he had seen coming into town on the spent horse.

The man was talking now to another who had joined him—a large, rather florid individual who wore the dress of the larger towns, with a huge gold watch-chain across a broad expanse of vest. The pair took several drinks, which did not appear to improve the temper of the large man.

Lang watched them casually while he dallied with more libation. He could not overhear what was being said for the men were talking in an undertone.

They paid no attention to him until the smaller man, whom Lang had seen with Hemp, stepped back apparently amused at some remark of the other's and included all within the room in a sweeping invitation to "irrigate." Then he recognized Lang.

"Say, young feller," he said abruptly, "you made a mistake last night."

"Y-e-s?" drawled Lang. "Well, if I did, it isn't the first one I've made."

"No, but it's liable to prove the worst one," said the other with a sinister scowl.

"Where'd you get your imformation?" queried Lang.

"Yo're a fool to make light of it. Hemp's a go-getter an' he'll get you for rilin' him, mark what I'm a'sayin'—he's bad."

"Did he send you to hunt me up and throw a scare into me?" sneered Lang.

"He ain't sent me to look nobody up—least not you. I'm a-tellin' you for yore own good."

"And you tell your chief I'll be awaitin' for him any time he wants to make good his threat," exclaimed Lang angrily.

"It ain't no threat; it's a promise."

"Say, friend, you're getting a bit thick, aren't you? Coming to me with a threat from an outlaw! Seems to be that you're not travelling with the kind of a bunch that would find it exactly safe to be standing up to a bar in town spilling warnings of gun-play."

"You don't know who I'm travelin' with and it's none of yore —— business," roared the other.

"Hemp made it my business when he butted in on me with his outlaw proposition last night, an' you know it for you were with him," answered Lang in cold, crisp tones.

BOTH men had stepped back from the bar with their right hands tense at their sides, fingers partly crooked.

"I believe at that that Hemp sent you south to head me off and try to throw a scare into me or maybe worse," continued Lang. "I'm on to Hemp's game, an' it hadn't ought to make him feel any too safe."

"Who is this fellow?" blurted the big man, who edged along the bar and confronted Lang.

"He's a quitter," snarled the smaller man, who was in a rage.

"You lie, an' you know it!" shot Lang in a clear voice.

"There's only one answer to that," said the small man.

"It's up to you," replied Lang.

The others in the place had backed away and now crowded against the wall opposite the bar. The face of the big man had paled.

"To get right down to cases, this ain't our quarrel," said the man facing Lang.

"I see," sneered Lang, his right hand relaxing. "You're one of the pair Hemp kicked out. What was the trouble? Yellow?"

With a howl of inarticulate rage the small man dropped to the left, falling almost to the floor, where he rested on his left hand as his right shot under his coat for his gun. But Lang was acquainted with this trick and in the instant that it all happened his weapon spurted flame and the man crouching on the floor toppled over upon his back.

Lang whirled toward the door with his gun sweeping in a semicircle.

"My ——!" exclaimed the big man, lunging from the bar with bulging eyes and reaching to his hip.

There was a glint of metal as he withdrew his hand and again Lang's gun shattered the silence.

The big man paused with a silly look of perplexity upon his features and crumpled to the floor. The sound of his falling body was accompanied by a clatter of metal as the fingers of his right hand relaxed.

Silence.

Then from Lang's lips came a cry of horror as he stared at the object on the floor. But in another moment he had backed out of the door and was running for his horse.

He noted for an instant the figure of a mounted man in the street before the saloon. Then he leaped into the saddle, and, spurring his horse in a frenzy, sped for the open country.

Burt Condon dismounted hurriedly, glanced within the saloon, regained his horse and started in the direction taken by Lang. Two miles out of town Condon was overtaken by a posse of three men; one—the leader—wore a silver star on his shirt.

"Did you see a slim, good-lookin' sort of chap ridin' a bay beatin' it outa town?" demanded the deputy.

"An' ridin' like mad," said Condon quickly. "What was his hurry?"

"Which way did he go?" cried the trio in chorus.

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Condon in mock surprize.

"A killer, you fool," shouted the deputy. "An' it jest happens he choosed too big a man this time; if it was just that mean little scrub I wouldn't be in such a scramble."

He paused as if irritated that he had taken time to give vent to this reflection.

"What way did he go?" he roared.

"Up that way a short piece an' then struck due south," said Condon, pointing first southeast and then south.

"Makin' for the Missouri probably; come on," yelled the deputy.

The posse vanished southward in a cloud of flying dust. But Condon, reaching the upper rim of the dip in the prairie, saw another cloud of dust swirling eastward toward the Teton and The Knees. This was a small cloud, barely discernible, such as would have been made by a single horseman; and he started swiftly in pursuit.

V

IT WAS nearly dawn of the following day when Lang Rush crossed the Teton and made his way to his ranch. He had regretted the natural impulse which had prompted him to flee up the river toward home, but now he believed he had done a wise thing in coming to the very last place where those who were looking for him would expect to find him.

In the first light of the breaking day he rounded up two horses.

"Hate to change mounts," he said aloud.

But it was a case of necessity, for Dandy had been ridden hard during the night and Rush had a long way to go. He picked out a tall, rangy roan to ride; not a speedy horse but one possessing great powers of endurance. Also, this horse bore no brand.

The second horse he selected—a small, sturdy bay built for travel and accustomed to carrying a pack—was another animal which was unbranded.

Lang saddled the roan and slung his rifle from the horn. He put the pack-saddle on the bay and filled two pack-sacks with food-stuffs from the meager supplies remaining in the ranch-house. Over the top of the sacks he placed a piece of stout tarpaulin and a heavy blanket with a few cooking-utensils inside its folds. Then he threw a single diamond and drew the pack fast in the hitch. He spent ten minutes finding an ax, which he twisted under the tight rope.

On his saddle with the yellow slicker he tied an old but serviceable mackinaw. He crammed his pockets with cartridges for both rifle and revolver.

Then he vaulted into the leather and swept the far-flung landscape with a searching gaze. His eyes sparkled fire—the dangerous, daring, glinting fire of the range-rider who senses the approach of trouble and welcomes it with a devil-may-care laugh and burning guns.

This was a different Lang Rush from the man who had talked quietly with Ferguson, the banker, a few days before.

He swung his mount, pulled gently but insistently on the rope attached to the snug halter of the pack-horse, crossed the open space between the house and barn, passed through the main gate, and rode to the edge of a deep gully which had held the water-supply used for the stock but which had now gone dry for lack of rain.

Here he hesitated a minute with his face turned toward the glory of the sunrise on the horizon eastward beyond The Knees. He made a half-gesture of farewell and shifted his gaze to the north. In this direction the rolling prairie stretched like a gray blanket to three purple peaks some hundred and fifty miles away.

"The Sweetgrass Hills," he muttered and shook his head. "Too far without cover."

There were but few homestead shacks in this direction, for there was a wide strip of broken ground, gullies and coulées and vast areas of gumbo—the thick, sticky Montana mud which bakes hard and cracks in the sun and is virtually impassable when wet.

Lang urged his horse down into the gully with the pack-animal following, and, thus concealed from view of a y one except whoever might be on the rim immediately above him, he began his journey north.

Hardly had he disappeared when two riders appeared on the horizon. One was coming slowly from the south—from the direction of the river beyond the ranch; and the other was cutting across from the southwest, riding fast and furiously, aiming apparently for a point in the north which Rush would have to pass.

VI

IN THE noonday sun shone through a fleecy haze of clouds down upon a deep depression in a torn and gullied section of the prairie and its rays slanted through a growth of thick willows and glittered upon still water.

Lang Rush stepped out of the cool, cleansing pool known as Sixty-Mile Spring and the drops upon his naked body sparkled like diamonds. He shook his lean, perfectly proportioned limbs and arms in an ecstasy of luxury and then stretched his full length.

The gods must have smiled! For here was a

magnificent specimen of the human male. Strength and grace, his fine features embellished by a coat of healthy tan that matched in color the bronze of his rumpled hair; gray-brown eyes that glowed with the vitality and exuberance of youth; a firm chin; perfect teeth that gleamed as his smile flashed; a deep chest, slim waist—as agile as a young wildcat!

Suddenly Lang dropped his arms and stiffened. From the rim of the deep coulée came the resounding echo of a horse's hoofs. He leaped into the willows and emerged into the grass-covered clearing with his rifle tight against his naked shoulder just as a rider appeared above.

"Hold on thar!" sang a lusty voice as two hands shot skyward. "Wal, yo're some fine-appearin' fugitive, Mr. Rush; you shore are!"

"Lem Robbins!" cried Lang, dropping the rifle.

"The same's me, Lang; the same's me," rumbled Robbins as he slid his horse down the steep, sloping bank of the coulée.

The newcomer loosened his saddle-cinches and advanced with hand outstretched.

"I allowed you might hang up here a brief spell," he grinned as they shook hands; "but with half a dozen posses lookin' fer yo're skin I didn't think you'd stop to take a bath."

"Lem, I couldn't help it," laughed Rush. "We've had so much dry weather and the water looked so good and clear—and I feel so cheerful——"

"Eh—what's that?" stammered Robbins.

"Well, it may sound funny, but it's a fact," confessed Lang, pulling on his clothes and smiling at the man who once worked for his father.

"Trouble agrees with you, eh?" said Robbins in a doubtful voice.

"It seems to set all right now that it's come."

"I was right sorry to hear about it, son; I shore was. I know you had good cause—it was self-defense pure and simple with that rat that pulled his gun on you. But Drayton; well, Drayton makes it bad."

"Drayton? Who is Drayton?"

"Didn't you know him? He's the big fellow you plugged when——"

"I thought he was drawing on me, Lem."

"No doubt, no doubt—shore you did. But he's a big man; owns a tenth of Teton County, might say; was sure o' being 'lected State senator this Fall; going to irrigate a lot of land under the Carey Act an' all that; lots o' friends——"

"Dead?" interrupted Lang anxiously.

"The little rat? Yes."

"But Drayton?"

"Shot above the heart, son; he ain't got a chance."

"Lem, listen!" cried Lang in agony. "You know I didn't know him an' thought he was drawing on me, don't you, Lem? I didn't know he was diving for that—that——"

Lang actually sobbed.

"Lem, I wouldn't shoot a man down if I didn't think he was trying to get me, an' it sure looked like it down there."

"I know, son," said Robbins kindly; "but Drayton is a big man an' got a sheep-car full o' powerful friends, an' if they get hold of you—good night! You won't have as much chance as a buck in deep snow with the wolves after him."

"They'll never get me, Lem," exclaimed Lang with a brooding, dangerous light in his eyes; "not alive!"

"I hope they don't; but there's something else you ought to know. They've got another count against you."

"Yep? What's that?"

Robbins shifted his gaze uneasily before he spoke again.

"Hemp's gang robbed the Bradley bank last night."

"On the job already!" Lang ejaculated. "But what's that got to do with me?"

"They think you were with the gang," said Robbins, looking at the ground.

"What!" cried Lang in astonishment.

"The livery-stable man heard Hemp call yo're name as the gang made off."

"The skunk!" cried Lang in indignation. "Did that to implicate me because he's got it in for me. Why, didn't they know I knocked Hemp down for asking me to go with his gang two nights ago?"

"I don't believe they know he asked you to trail with him and they think the fight was a stall," explained Robbins feebly.

"Stall ——! An' didn't I plug one of his men who tried to draw on me down in Muddy after he'd told me Hemp would get me?"

"Yes, but you see—the fellow you plugged had been kicked out by Hemp."

"I see," said Rush bitterly; "an' they think I was sore at him for that reason?"

"I suppose so," said Robbins rather vaguely. "Wait till I take a look around."

Robbins climbed to the rim of the coulée to gaze about while Lang cinched his saddle and replaced his rifle in its case which was suspended from the horn. It made him fighting mad to think that Hemp had succeeded in directing suspicion toward him for a second offense of which he was innocent.

"You see it's this way," explained Robbins, returning. "They know you had a talk with Hemp in the back room of Grimes' place; then you left an' they left right after. They think you joined the gang somewhere out on the prairie.

"Then you was askin' in Muddy fer me, an' they think you maybe was figurin' on—on gettin' me in on the deal.

"Then you plugged that rat that Hemp kicked out, an' that looked bad—to say nothin'

of Drayton, who alers had it in fer Hemp, an' who was scheming with the rat to get Hemp at the very time you got in on the play. They think you joined the gang and helped pull off the robbery las' night."

"And so they're looking for me with the Hemp gang."

"Yes, but maybe they figure the gang split up."

Lang nodded grimly and glanced at his horses.

"Lem, last night I was making it for the ranch down the Teton. You don't think I was in with Hemp on that bank deal, do you?"

"I know —— well you wasn't!" exclaimed Robbins quickly. "But it—it looks bad from all sides; an' yo're in one —— of a scrape over shootin' Drayton. Now last night I crossed yo're trail up the Teton and I saw another set of tracks followin' yourn."

"You think somebody's tagging me?" asked Lang, startled.

"Maybe somebody jest happened along that way, but you know there'll be one whale of a reward cut fer you. I cut across country, ridin' like mad, figurin' you'd make up this way an' maybe lay over till dark here at Sixty-Mile, jest to tip you off. Yore daddy was my friend, an' by —— I'm yourn. An' I was afraid you'd hit straight north to the line."

"Not a chance," scoffed Lang. "Too far—too flat."

"An' I was afraid you'd forgotten something."

A cloud obscured the sun and both men looked up involuntarily. A freshened breeze whispered in the willows.

"What'd you think maybe I'd forgotten, Lem?"

"They're using automobiles round these parts some now," said Robbins meaningly.

VII

"BUT they're not going to chase me with automobiles where I'm going," said Lang at length, although his face was serious. "And I'm not afraid of any one trailing me; but thanks for the tip just the same, Lem. I *had* forgotten about the machines; I'll keep an eye out."

"You figurin' on startin' on now, Lang?"

"Yes," said Lang.

A shadow fell over the coulée, and both men again glanced instinctively up at the sky.

"Let's take a look around," said Robbins.

They climbed to the rim of the coulée. Clouds were riding in the high skies from the northwest. But on the golden expanse of prairie no moving thing was in sight.

"First clouds that look like they meant business I seen in a long time," observed Robbins. "It'll rain now probably; now that it's too late to do any good," said Lang bitterly.

They dropped back into the coulée.

"Which way you going, Lem?"

Robbins kept his eyes upon his saddle as he tightened the cinch.

"I'll be hittin' southeast," he replied.

"It wouldn't be a good thing for us to be seen together," said Lang.

"No—that is, I dunno—no, I guess it wouldn't."

Something in the other's tone made Lang look at him sharply.

"Say, Lem, look here. Are you gettin' me pegged wrong? Do you think I've gone bad since the days I followed the wagon on roundup?"

"No, Lang, no! It ain't that——"

Robbins seemed on the point of saying something more, but desisted.

"You don't think I was with Hemp's gang?"

"I know you wasn't, son."

"Then you think I bored that pair in Muddy on purpose and for deviltry?"

"No, I don't—I'm only hoping you get safe out of it, son."

No more was said as they prepared to go; but Lang felt a bitter sorrow in his heart. What did Lem Robbins think? Were the few tried friends he had in doubt about him?

The reflection added fire to the flames of anger and strengthened his determination to resist any attempts to deprive him of the freedom of the open which he loved and to make him atone for a crime he had unwittingly committed.

"The gumbo flats are three miles north of here," said Robbins as he mounted. "There ain't a shack on 'em."

"I know," replied Lang. "I'm heading for 'em."

"They'll be figurin' you'd hit for the Missouri bad lands or the line probably."

"I'm banking on their figuring that way," answered Lang, swinging into the saddle.

"'Bout forty miles due west and then——"

"The Rockies!" supplied Lang.

"So-long," said Robbins.

It was the prairie country's simple, friendly phrase of parting.

"So-long," said Lang; but he bit his lip as their hands met.

Robbins rode rapidly south, taking the trail by which Lang had come. Shortly, however, he left this trail and rode east.

Lang turned his horse north and with the pack-animal following trotted briskly up the narrow, hard-baked floor of the long, winding coulée.

The deep gash in the prairie narrowed and progress had to be made at a slower pace as he proceeded. It was past mid-afternoon when he edged up a narrow shelf of earth and gravel and cautiously emerged upon the gumbo flat

which stretched north and west—a desolate land, almost bare of vegetation, with a hard surface, baked and cracked, and seamed with shallow gullies.

Taking advantage of the irregular depressions which marked the courses of the gullies, Lang struck due west toward the jagged purple outlines of the towering mountains. He made rapid progress on the hard crust of the gumbo. The clouds in the northwest had gathered and now were flying almost overhead while the wind was blowing from the east.

There were two currents of air—certain harbinger of a terrific prairie storm; the result of gathering electrical force following the long period of continued heat.

And now Lang saw something which sent a wild thrill through his body. Far to the south a cloud of dust was riding upon the wind. It was moving swiftly, too swiftly for horsemen; coming along the one main road that cut through that country from Great Falls at the big bend of the Missouri to Shelby in the northern sheep section.

Lang surmised in a minute that it was an automobile. From where? There were no machines in Muddy nor in Bradley. It must be coming from Great Falls, or more likely from Choteau, the county seat. Which could mean but one thing—the swift-moving hand of the law.

Lang urged his horses ahead in a wild lope, searching the scarred face of the flats for a depression deep enough to afford him concealment. But he was not thoroughly familiar with the speed which could be developed by the small, sturdy cars that had been found best suited to that country.

The machine gained rapidly but appeared to be heading east of him. It had left the main road. The wind was now blowing a veritable gale from the east, and the hurrying cloud-bank above had blotted out the sun. Above the mountains in the west the sky was black as an inky void; and this curtain of darkness was creeping steadily eastward.

Lang turned in the saddle with a glint of blue steel in his eyes and his lips compressed into a thin, white line as he noted that the flying car had veered again and was bearing straight for him from the southeast. They had seen him.

He cursed softly without knowing he did so. He might better have waited until night before venturing out upon the flats. But he had depended upon the gullies; and the lack of water and the wind biting away the ridges and filling up the bottoms had fooled him—they were too shallow to screen him from sight. Now it was too late to retrace his course.

He patted the rifle-butt before him and smiled whimsically into the west, where the black bulk of the mountains and safety mocked him.

The car came on; now it was five miles away, now four, now three. It had reached the gumbo and a hard surface, which, except for cracks which meant a little jarring and discomfort for the occupants of the machine, was like a paved highway.

Lang, his face grim and set and a bit pale under the tan, turned into a shallow wash and dismounted. The horses edged closely together with reins and halter rope dangling, snorting in the face of the impending storm. Lang took his rifle, spilled some cartridges upon the rim of the wash toward the approaching car, and crouched down behind the protecting bank of earth.

As if at the touch of a wand by the master of the heavens the wind suddenly was stilled. High above, the two opposing air currents had clashed, and in the brief struggle there was a lull and the darkness settled down like a pall.

Then the storm-wind leaped down with a roar and across the murky heavens shot a livid flash of forked lightning. There was a crashing, deafening thunderbolt, and the rain in sheets of gray swept across the flats.

Lang, leveling his gun, slowly lowered it from his shoulder. He saw the rushing car swerve dangerously to the right, snap to the left, turn completely around twice and come to a standstill.

"The gumbo!" he shrilled aloud to the storm as he turned his face up to the rain.

Twice he saw the car slide forward a bit and stop. The surface of the flats, which a moment before had been so hard, now was shining in the rain—as slippery as a waxed dancing-floor. No rubber-tired machine could make progress on that sliding, slimy surface, as smooth as glass. And by the time chains were adjusted or rope tied about the tires the mud would have thickened; and there is no mud so sticky, clinging and maddening as pure gumbo. Progress is possible on these flats only on horseback. The sharp shoes of a shod horse cut the mud and the flying hoofs throw it off.

Lang laughed wildly in exultation as he replaced his rifle and cartridges and leaped into the saddle. He heard the faint boom of guns, but the distance and the wind were too great for bullets. He cut across a number of gullies and washes north and then headed west again. The rain was falling in torrents.

Suddenly Lang glimpsed what appeared to be a long, narrow white ribbon ahead; it wound from the south and turned due west. Again he shouted in an excess of glee.

In a few minutes his horses splashed into the water that covered a narrow indentation in the gumbo barely a foot wide. They surged forward with hoofs flying free of the treacherous mud for the narrow trail was as hard as solid rock.

"We'll make time now," sang Lang, looking

back at the motionless car which he was fast leaving behind.

The hoofbeats rang against the firm surface, for the horses now were following an ancient buffalo-trail, pounded hard for hundreds of years in the dim past by herds of bison traveling in single file across the plains.

Night had fallen almost on the heels of the storm. It would be hours and hours before the men in the marooned car could get out of the gumbo and make the long détour around the flats.

Lang held his horses at a stiff pace into the west. He untied the yellow slicker behind and slipped it on. It covered the rifle-butt and saddle-horn in front and reached well over the cantle of the saddle in back. With the wind and rain in his face he rode on through the storm-swept night.

VIII

DAWN disclosed to Lang's eyes a new panorama of indescribable beauty. He had covered a great distance during the night, left the wide expanse of gumbo far behind, crossed a sea of scented sage and bunch-grass, and now he was in a country of rolling hills and streams fringed with cottonwoods; hills that steadily became steeper with sharp tumbled ridges, and here and there a growth of alder and pine.

He was in the foot-hills of the Rockies.

He kept as much as possible to the meadows and the grassy sides of the slopes, avoiding the open, muddy stretches of trail where the tracks of his horses might show too plainly. The rain had ceased, and finally when the sun was up he turned aside from his course, topped a ridge and dropped down into a narrow cañon screened from view by a thicket of scrub pines and bushes.

Here he unsaddled the horse he had ridden and removed the packs from the other animal. From one of the pack-sacks he secured a double set of hobbles which he had thoughtfully included with his provisions; and he hobbled the horses. The animals were tired; he knew they would feed a while on the rich grass on the cañon's sides and then lie down to rest.

Lang himself could have pushed on, for he possessed too great a measure of youthful vitality to miss a night's sleep. But he had to watch out for his horses. And his eyes were smarting and sore from the night's straining vigil in the wind and pelting rain.

From the folds of the blanket he took a small granite-wear coffee-pot in which a cup was nested together with some wooden-handled knives and forks and spoons. Then came the diminutive frying-pan or skillet, ground coffee, a slab of bacon, and hard, dry biscuits.

He found a pine-stump and cleaved to the center of it with his ax. Here the wood cut very hard for it was rich with pitch. He cut a number of thick chips of this pitch-soaked wood, lit them with a match and almost instantly had a hot little fire.

The coffee-pot, half-filled with water from the little stream in the bottom of the gulch and generously enriched with the steel-cut berries, he propped against the side of the fire. Then he covered the inside of the frying-pan with thick strips of bacon and held it over the flames. When the bacon was fried to a juicy crisp and the coffee was done he covered the coals with earth and ate a hearty breakfast.

When he had finished eating he spread the piece of tarpaulin on the soft grass and arranged the mackinaw for a pillow. He spread the saddle-blankets in the sun to dry. Then he removed his riding-boots, placed his revolver and rifle handy, rolled a cigaret and lay down, enjoying his smoke and the sweet smell of the pines after the rain.

Lang did not fear that his pursuers would catch up with him before he again took the trail, even if they surmised that he had taken to the hills. The imprints of his horses' hoofs had been washed away by the rain. There were scores of places where he might hit for the mountains; indeed, he had entered the hills at random.

The men in the car who had followed him—if they really had been following him, as appearances certainly seemed to bear out—perhaps were not sure that he was the man they were looking for. Another day and he would be safe in the hidden recesses of the mountains.

He laughed joyously, and dangerously, as he finished his smoke and dozed.

Lang could not know that keen eyes had watched the little drama on the flats from the rim of the coulée by Sixty-Mile Spring; nor that when the occupants of the little car finally had gotten it out of the gumbo and started on a wide détour to the south a single rider had set out with cunning instinct upon his trail.

He slept. The horses rolled, drank, grazed upon the rich native grasses to which they were accustomed, and then rested.

The sun swung across the high skies and dropped with a splash of crimson behind the western peaks before Lang, rested and refreshed, with hunger again appeased, resumed the trail.

And this night as he climbed steadily up a narrow mountain path beside a swift-rushing stream he had the advantage of the light of the moon and the stars. Several times when he thought he heard an unusual noise on the trail behind him he halted and waited, listening. But always he pushed on, higher, higher and higher.

The casual growth and scrub timber gave way to towering sentinels of fir and pine and

spruce, and the aisles of the forest widened as Lang crept over the ridges and mounted steadily toward the main divide.

When the trail began to pitch steeply, and rocks and abrupt turns with sheer precipices on one side or the other made the going perilous, Lang stopped for the balance of the night, turning aside from the trail and making camp at the head of a deep ravine.

But early in the morning he was on his way again, frequently leading the horses in dangerous places; and with the next sunset he was on the rock-bound summit of the divide. Here he found a series of beautiful little parks leading southward, and he followed them for a few miles and made camp.

Thus far he had encountered no one, which was well; for Lang had meant it when he said he would not be taken alive. At the first attempt to capture him he meant to shoot to kill and if they cornered him he would die with his boots on. Better that than to be taken back to languish in jail and be convicted through the influence of Drayton's friends.

Murder and bank-robbery! What chance would he have among enemies facing two such charges? His eyes shot fire when he thought of Hemp's dastardly trick and his own foolhardiness.

No, there would be no capture. If the posses now scouring the lowlands came into the hills and cornered him it would be to the death.

He laughed recklessly.

Next day he continued in a southerly direction, dropping down into a long valley. This day he met a forest ranger, to his chagrin. But the officer was on his way to the Spotted Bear Station on the south fork of the Flathead River and was going from there to the district office in Kalispel, so he did not stop to ask questions or to observe Lang very closely.

After this Lang was more careful, and several times he hid in the timber or made a wide détour to avoid meeting the silent men who patrolled the forest.

Three days he continued southward through a wildly rugged country with the great white peaks of the main divide of the Rockies at his back. Then he found himself confronted by a cross-range which cut over the divide.

He scaled this and looked down into a sequestered valley which snuggled in the apex of the triangle formed by the two high ridges. Far below wound a ribbon of silver which he knew was the headwaters of a river. The country was at the top and in the very center of the mountains; and the steep slopes of the hidden valley were clothed in virgin pine and fir. It seemed a natural hiding-place for a fugitive.

A whole day it took Lang to get down the steep sides of the divide into that little valley. And as he was entering it from the upper end he met an old man of the mountains, apparently a prospector, nearly blind with age.

"What do they call this country in here?" asked Lang.

He had to repeat his question in a louder voice close to the old man's ear before the other could hear him.

"This is as fur up the crick as ye can git on Singing River," answered the old man in a querulous voice. "Goin' ter stay?"

"No," said Lang as he rode on.

But two miles down the river he turned his horses into a deep draw that made a gash into the side of the mountain and followed a little trickle of water to a big spring at its head. The mouth of the draw faced west, and he now was on the western side of the divide.

Here he unsaddled and made camp.

"Singing River," he mused as he looked up at the gnarled and jagged outcroppings of rock which overhung the head of the draw, making approach from behind impossible. "A good place to hide and rest—or fight."

IX

THAT night Lang slept soundly, lulled by the sense of security which the covering of scores of miles from the scene of his troubles gave him and reassured by the isolated location of his mountain hiding-place.

In the morning he discovered that his saddle-horse had developed a decided limp in its left foreleg, and he resolved to remain where he was until such time as he could go on across the high ranges and hit for Idaho or perhaps the coast.

It had been too dark when he reached the head of the draw the night before to do much exploring; but this morning after he had prepared and eaten a hearty breakfast he began to look around.

Behind and on either side there was an almost perpendicular wall of rock, topped by jagged crags which ranged to the top of the east divide. Any one coming into the draw would have to approach from the little valley.

And under a shelf of rock on the north side of the draw near the spring, screened by aspens and cedar bushes, Lang discovered a small log cabin. Although it had not been used in years it was well preserved by the dry air of the altitudes and was comparatively clean.

It contained two bunks, a table, two chairs, and a bench—all made from saplings and slabs hewn from cedar. Also there was a sheet-iron stove, rusted and falling to pieces, but which could be repaired with wire; and several lengths of stove-pipe still hung from an opening in the roof.

It had likely been the abode of a trapper, or perhaps a prospector; but it was quite evidently deserted and forgotten, and Lang moved in.

There was plenty of water and rich feed for the horses, and Lang allowed them to graze at will. He discarded his coat, stood the rifle in a convenient location near the door of the cabin and wore his cartridge-belt with his six-shooter in its black sheath strapped to his right thigh.

He went down and inspected the mouth of the draw. There was a screen of young silver firs across it and just outside where the valley sloped away were two tall pines, one on either side of the mouth of the draw.

As Lang looked down the valley he was surprized to see that there were evidences of cultivation in this isolated spot; for here and there on the sides of the stream were small fields of grain—oats probably. Some cabins were to be seen, too; small structures built of logs—and there were cattle grazing. Settlers on timber-claims or forest homesteads doubtless lived in the valley.

Lang returned to his cabin to take stock of his scanty supply of provisions and if possible to get the stove in working order. And while he was thus engaged he heard the horses snort and the sounds of boots on the rocky trail up the draw.

He leaped out of the door gun in hand just as a grizzled, burly individual in rough mountain dress halted before the cabin.

The newcomer raised his hands quickly when he saw he was covered by Lang's gun.

"Who you lookin' for?" demanded Lang in a sinister voice.

"Nobody in pertic'ler," drawled the man, who didn't seem surprized. "Just seen tracks leadin' in here an' thought maybe I might know who was up here."

Lang did not lower his gun, for the other man was armed. But the stranger was plainly of the mountains and not from the lowlands, which was reassuring.

"Where you from?" asked Lang coldly.

"From the Rocky Mountains," was the ready reply. "Jest now I'm hangin' out down by the town."

"What town?" gasped Lang.

"Singing River's a piece down the crick. Not a very big town—half store an' half saloon—but any place where ye kin git grub an' licker's a town up here. Mind if I drop my hands a bit, stranger?"

"All right so long as you keep 'em away from that shootin'-iron of yours," said Lang, still keeping the other covered.

"Ye needn't fear thet anybody's goin' to try to jump yer claim up here, young feller; they got hard notions 'bout sech things in this country."

"Who said anything about a claim?"

"Well, yere prospectin', ain't ye?"

"I'm not answering any questions," said Lang pointedly. "And I'm not lookin' for any visitors."

"Well then, I guess I'll be a-goin' if thet's the case. My name's Nixon. I been pecking at these hills fer twenty years, an' I've got some right good-lookin' claims up t'other side of the valley. Ye ain't got nothin' to fear from me, fer——"

"I'll walk down with you," interrupted Lang, motioning toward the trail leading down from the spring.

Evidently the man believed Lang to be a prospector who was afraid somebody would jump a claim he had in the draw. It was best to allow him to continue under that impression and to force it indelibly upon his mind.

In silence they walked down to the mouth of the gulch or draw, the stranger evidently holding in check with some difficulty questions which he would have liked to ask.

As they stepped out beyond the fringe of silver firs Lang, still holding his gun at a menacing angle, spoke slowly and convincingly.

"You see that tall pine on that side of the mouth of this draw and the tall pine here on the other side?"

He pointed first to one tree and then to the one opposite.

Nixon nodded.

"I'm going to put a mental blaze on those two trees," said Lang meaningly. "And I'm going to draw a line right across between the two in my mind—a line across the mouth of this draw. No one will be able to see it; but I'll know it's here. And any man who steps across that line is more than liable to stop hot lead."

This was indeed the Gospel truth, for Lang did not intend to take any chances; and the light in his eyes must have conveyed this fact to Nixon.

"I guess you mean it all right, young feller."

"I mean it," said Lang in a cold, convincing tone.

"A dead-line, eh? Well you must have so'thin' rich up there, stranger; but it ain't none of my business. I ain't goin' ter take any chances. There's others might be bolder; but we ain't got much law up here on Singin' River, an' when a man steps out an' declares hisself it usually goes. I'll be a-goin' now."

"Just a minute," said Lang. "How far is it down to this town?"

"Well, as I say ye can't hardly call it a town; but it stands fer one, an' it's so'thin' like five miles; yes, it's a good five miles, maybe a little more. It might be——"

"How many people live down there?"

"I reckon they's about a dozen er fifteen—but they's a good fifty lives here in the upper end o' the valley, scattered round; an' now an' then somebody drifts in from the hills, but not often."

Lang welcomed this last information with secret satisfaction.

"Post-office down there?"

"No; we don't pay much 'tention to mail up here. Ye can send in yer notice when the storekeeper goes across the range with his pack-train fer supplies; but nobody'll bother ye. We got our own notions 'bout law up here, an' it 'pears to work out all right."

"When's the storekeeper goin' out again?" asked Lang.

"Why, he jest got back 'bout ten days ago. He won't go again fer a month er maybe more."

"I see," said Lang, turning back toward the draw to conceal the satisfaction in his eyes.

He watched Nixon as the latter tramped out of sight down the valley. The word of his dead-line would spread soon enough to prevent any other casual visitors, Lang believed; for he felt that the mountaineers would respect his warning. Nixon had virtually said as much.

No law in Singing River—except that which the scattered population decreed itself. Each man for himself. It was the way Lang would have it. And now that he had given his warning he might fairly assume that any visitor who came to his rendezvous would be an enemy. In which event—

He fingered the butt of his gun and smiled a smile in which lurked no suggestion of mirth.

Almost at this instant he caught sight of a splotch of color through the screen of firs inside the mouth of the draw and heard the echo of footfalls upon the stones.

Jerking his gun from its sheath, he leaped through the trees and then stood aghast at the edge of the inner meadow.

X

VISIONS of the authority of the long-reaching arm of the law in the sinister person of some legalized trailer had flashed through his mind the moment he became aware of the presence of another in the gulch; but the vision which now greeted his eyes was so different, so seemingly out of place, and altogether so extraordinary that Lang Rush stood abashed; the hand holding the weapon hung at his side, his mouth opened and his eyes widened in surprize.

Before him in the little amphitheater formed by the timber was a girl. Her arms were filled with wild roses and daisies, columbine and larkspur, and the little nameless blue and white blossoms that grace the mountain meadows. The sun was in her hair and it shone like spun gold. The tresses fell down her back and upon her shoulders and seemed to caress her cheeks, which were the color of a white lily petal tinted by a pink gleam of a sunset.

Slim and graceful she stood, like some wild mountain flower in the meadow about her; and as Lang looked into her eyes with the frankness of startled youth he thought they must be the color of blue seas and blue skies seen through a sparkle of spray.

In that long moment of stillness he heard the little river in the valley below and behind them purring on its swift way down from the mountain springs where it had its source, and he knew why they called it Singing River.

The girl was first to speak.

"Were you going to shoot somebody?" she asked in what Lang classified immediately as the sweetest voice he had ever heard.

"I didn't know—pardon!" stammered Lang with a red glow showing through his tan.

He hastily put up his gun and swept his hat from his head.

"One—never knows in the mountains these days—ah—what to expect," he explained lamely.

"Perhaps you're right," answered the girl as she looked at him curiously and then lowered her long lashes before his gaze.

"Do you live up here?" she asked.

"I'm living here just now," he smiled. "Do you live here?"

"I've always lived here," she replied seriously. "This valley is my home, and I've been out in one of my gardens picking flowers."

"Is this one of your gardens in here?" queried Lang uneasily.

"Oh, yes! I come up on this side of the valley now because the roses are better up here. I guess it's not so hot for them perhaps."

"It does seem shadier on the other side," observed Lang, looking about somewhat foolishly. "But I'm afraid I've intruded in this garden of yours."

"One doesn't intrude up here," she said. "God made these beautiful mountains for every one."

Lang started. What an odd thought; and how serious she appeared for one so youthful—and so beautiful!

"I'm living in here for the present," he remarked finally.

"You are not from the mountains?"

She put the question naturally, but Lang was instinctively upon his guard.

"Not altogether," he said; "but I—I like it up here."

Behind covert lashes she was inspecting his attire.

"You have been riding a great deal, haven't you?"

Again Lang started. How could she tell that? He glanced furtively at his worn boots and remembered he still wore his spurs. Then, thinking to turn the conversation into new channels and away from himself, he asked—

"Do you live near here?"

"A mile around the bend in the river."

He was impressed by the fact that she did not seem at all afraid of him, regardless of the peculiar circumstances attending their meeting. Nor did she seem in the least embarrassed to be talking thus to a man she did not know. She had courage, this girl; courage and something else. Poise? More than that.

Whatever it was, it was a part of her and a part of her environment. The rugged setting in which she appeared merely served to enhance her charm. She was unlike any girl he ever had met.

"Might I ask your name?" he said boldly.

"Alice Thornton—and yours?"

"Lang——"

He caught himself with a sinking feeling of dismay. To no one had he intended to confide his real name. Danger! He saw a cool, questioning look in her eyes, as if she had read his thoughts. His mind worked rapidly.

"Langworth," he said quickly.

"Lang Worth," she repeated musically.

"No—all one word," he ejaculated. "Langworth."

"Oh."

And again that questioning scrutiny. Did she suspect something? He fingered his hat uneasily. The situation was getting out of his grasp.

"I'm glad you told me your name," she said. "Sometimes men come to Singing River who do not tell their names readily."

He met her gaze squarely.

"Perhaps they—have reasons," he said soberly.

"But wouldn't it be a funny sort of reason that would make a man want to conceal his name?"

She was sorting the flowers she carried but looked at him quickly when she had finished the question.

He knew now that if she didn't suspect him she at least didn't accept his reticence concerning himself as natural.

"Sometimes circumstances cut a big figure," he said slowly; "an' I reckon we can't always make the circumstances just what we want 'em."

He had kept his eyes on the ground; but now he looked up at the great white peaks, and his face was troubled.

She watched him closely; and then a sudden shyness seemed to come over her. Without a word she started toward the trees that screened the mouth of the draw.

"I hope you will come here for flowers whenever you want to," he called to her. "I—I won't bother you."

She turned and looked at him gravely.

"Thank you," she said, and was gone.

Lang stared at the narrow line of silver firs behind which she had disappeared. What a strange girl; and what a strange meeting; and what a strange conversation!

He was vaguely puzzled—a bit worried. Yet he felt a certain exhilaration. She was beautiful! Where had she learned to talk like that? Yet it wasn't what she said but the way in which she said it.

A subtle intuition told him that the communication between them had not consisted of words alone. And he could not forget the baffling light in her eyes when she had turned and looked at him before going.

Lang thoughtfully retraced his steps to the cabin at the head of the draw.

XI

FIVE miles down the river half a dozen log structures were clustered on the west bank of the stream facing a bridge. This was the town of Singing River, the supply point for the upper valley and the rugged, sparsely settled country thereabout. Two miles below here the river rushed into a narrow cañon and wound for miles between high, sheer walls of rock. Eventually it flowed out into another valley and became known by another name.

The largest of the buildings at Singing River was the store, saloon and eating-place owned and managed by Hiram Kane, an old-timer. The main part of the structure was devoted to the store, which contained a varied and limited stock of dry goods, clothing, shoes, furnishings, hardware, groceries, and other supplies—all transported by pack-train from the nearest town in the lowlands across the divide, some fifty miles away.

An addition to the main building contained a lunch counter and bar. There were two doors in this addition, one opening on the rear and the other leading into the store.

In the late afternoon four men were in this little saloon, and one of the men, Nixon, was talking.

"We got a visitor in the east draw at the upper end," he was saying.

Kane, the storekeeper, who now was officiating in the capacity of bartender, stopped wiping the glasses he was preparing to put out on the bar and showed interest.

"Up there just above old John Thornton's place?" he asked.

"Thet's right whar he is," nodded Nixon.

The two other men were looking at the prospector keenly. One of these men was cleanshaven, dark, with glittering black eyes set rather close together, and a lithe frame. His eyelids had the trick of narrowing to a mere slit on the slightest provocation. The other was blond, a bit fat; short, too—a man who bore marks of wild living and whose general appearance was sloven.

"What kind of a looking visitor?" snapped the dark-faced man.

"Wal now, Bransom, he's a right smart well set up, good-appearin' sort of animal; little younger as you are, I should say; 'bout twenty-seven, maybe, an'——"

"What's he doing in there?" interrupted Bransom.

"Wal now, yore a-comin' a bit fast, Bransom," drawled Nixon; "an' I didn't stop to ask him many questions. Fact is, he don't aim to have anybody pryin' inter his affairs, I take it. I took it that way from his manner o' sendin' me 'bout my own business, which —— knows I got enough of, tryin' to persuade people thet this here's a mineral country worth developin' an' not a dang——"

"What do you mean, not havin' anybody prying into his affairs and sendin' you about your business?" demanded Bransom in an evil tone.

"Why, nothin'; only he jest p'inted out them two big pines what stands on each side of the entrance to thet draw and says—

" 'See them?'

"I said I saw 'em; an' he jest politely told me thet in his mind—his mind, 'member—he had drawed a mark 'tween them two trees an' thet any gent who might be so foolish as to come idling across thet mark would be purty danged sure to stop a little hot lead, that's all. I gathered from thet——"

"A dead-line!" exclaimed Bransom, his eyes narrowing.

"Exactly," nodded Nixon. "I guess he don't aim to have no visitors much, an' it's my private notion thet he's got a danged good prospect in there an' don't want no interferin'. I alers have said——"

"Prospect ——!" sneered Bransom. "Ain't that what you say, Frued?"

The blond man who was standing behind Bransom, drinking in the talk, silently nodded and spat.

"It ain't no wild-goose mineral chase that brings a twenty-seven-year old man into this forsaken country to hole up in a draw," jeered Bransom.

"I was younger than thet when I started," reflected Nixon with a wistful look in his eyes.

"He don't have to draw no dead-line to protect his claim," said Bransom harshly. "We got our laws up here an' we obey 'em; don't we, Frued?"

Again the blond man nodded silently.

"Wal now, maybe he's jest a makin' his little law up there," observed Nixon. "An' it goes with me, fer one."

"Aye, if he wants that draw I guess he kin have it," said Kane, setting out the glasses.

"Looks queer to me," said Bransom.

"Off color," remarked Frued as he spat again.

"Well, you two came in here and staked out a gulch, didn't ye?" asked Kane.

"Yes; an' we been here some time, ain't we?" demanded Bransom savagely. "I paid for everything I got, ain't I? You ain't got no cause to be sorry we came in here have you, Kane?"

"No, no," said Kane in a soothing voice. "An' maybe this newcomer'll do likewise. Here's yore drinks, boys."

Frued tossed his liquor off at a gulp and left by the rear door. Nixon idled with his. Bransom was critical.

"You bring in poorer stuff every trip," he grumbled to the storekeeper.

"Did you ever stop to think that a man's lucky to be able to get a drink at all in here?" asked Kane. "I never hear no kicks about the quality of the liquor when I've run out. Then you fellers are houndin' me to death to make a trip out for more."

"Well, it takes two drinks to make one—of this stuff," snarled Bransom, wiping his lips with the back of his left hand. "Give us another, Kane."

As the second drink was being served there was a clatter of hoofs on the bridge. Kane hurriedly went into the store. The two men at the bar heard the sound of a girl's voice.

Instantly there was a change in Bransom's demeanor. He finished his drink quickly, straightened his hat, buttoned the two buttons at the neck of his blue flannel shirt and shifted his six-shooter well to the rear of his right thigh.

Nixon's face seemed a bit grim as he noted these activities on Bransom's part.

Then Bransom stepped into the store as a girl was leaving by the front way with a small package under her arm.

"Nice day, Alice," he said as he strode to the door behind her.

"Not unusual for July," said Alice Thornton as she walked toward her horse standing before the store.

"Can I ride up with you?" asked Bransom, following.

"Oh, it isn't so far that I need an escort," smiled the girl.

A scowl flitted over Bransom's face.

"I hear you got company up your way," he said.

"We? Company? Oh——"

She paused. Then she swung gracefully into the saddle man-fashion and smoothed the sides of her divided riding-skirt.

But Bransom knew by her manner that she had met the newcomer.

"Yes," he drawled, "in that draw above your place."

"I believe there *is* a man in there," she said quietly.

"Don't suppose you've met him already?" he smiled.

She looked at him, coolly defiant.

"Yes, I met him accidentally this morning when I was up there gathering flowers," she

said deliberately. "Why? Do you know him?"

"No, I don't know him. Nobody seems to know him. Didn't hear his name, I don't suppose."

She hesitated.

"His name is Langworth," she said, almost with a note of triumph in her voice.

"That's what he said, eh? Well he don't seem to want any visitors very bad from what he told old Nixon."

"Nixon? Was he talking with him?"

"Just long enough for this Langworth, as he calls himself, to tell him that there was a deadline across the mouth of that draw and that curious people was liable to stop a bullet."

The girl drew in her breath sharply.

"Sure you don't want me to ride home with you?" grinned Bransom.

For answer she swung her horse and rode swiftly across the bridge and up the valley.

Bransom looked after her darkly as she sped away. Then he gazed toward the upper end of the valley and his eyes narrowed to slits.

"Langworth?" he said to himself, and entered the store.

Nixon and Kane were in the bar.

"By the way, Nixon," said Bransom, "this feller up the valley didn't tell you his name, did he?"

"I didn't ask him," replied Nixon.

"His name's Langworth, so he says," said Bransom.

"Langworth? Did you meet him?"

"No, but Alice Thornton did. He told her that was his name, right quick. Seems—to be—handy at getting—acquainted."

Nixon and Kane remained silent, eying Bransom sharply.

"Maybe he ain't up here for minerals or for his health either," suggested Bransom evilly. "Maybe there's some attraction——"

"Bransom!" called Kane crisply.

"Yes, I think maybe we better take another swaller of liquor an' a'journ," said Nixon, glancing significantly at the storekeeper.

Outside a few minutes later Bransom twisted in the saddle and stared up the valley with eyes that glittered in the fitful gleams of the sunset as he rode toward the entrance of a dark, narrow gulch on the west side of the slope behind the town.

XII

LANG left his cabin at the sunset hour and walked slowly down to the mouth of the draw. There he paused and looked out across the narrow little valley, struck by the wondrous beauty of the scene. Above the slopes of pine the rock-strewn ridges ranged back to the shoulders of the glistening peaks, majestic in the high western skies, which were streaked with the crimson banners flaunted by the dying day.

A number of deer came tripping down from the edge of the timber opposite to drink in the cool waters of the mountain stream. A mother grouse with her brood, nearly full-grown and ready to shift for themselves, led her family proudly up the slope toward the roosting place in the trees within the draw.

Lang was not accustomed to the mountains. He missed the vast open spaces of the prairies. The brooding stillness of the high hills and the moan of the wind in the pines conveyed a note of lonesomeness which was accentuated by the feeling of solitude.

He almost welcomed the sudden sound of galloping hoofs on the trail leading down from the divide. He drew back within the screen of firs at the mouth of the draw.

In a few minutes a horseman came in sight. He pulled up his mount opposite the entrance to the draw, hesitated a moment, and then started toward the fringe of trees.

Lang stepped out with his right hand resting on the butt of his gun.

"Looking for some one?" he called.

The man in the saddle checked his horse so suddenly that the animal reared, and peered down at Lang.

"I'm looking for something to eat," he whined. "I'm —— near starved."

"How did you know there was anybody in here?" questioned Lang sharply.

"I saw smoke from up the trail a piece and thought maybe there was a house here."

"Where you from?"

"I'm from—from the Flathead country," was the answer.

"You're a long way from home, ain't you?"

Lang noted that the man carried no weapon.

"Yes I am—and I'm —— near starved!"

Lang hesitated. Singing River—the town—he understood was but a few miles south. He came nearer and looked intently at the other. He saw a comparatively young man with a freckled face marked by dissipation and with an ugly scar above the left eye.

Something struck into Lang's memory and convinced him that somewhere he had seen this man before. Something about him seemed familiar in a vague way. Was it the manner in which he sat in the saddle—something about that leaning posture, the slipshod attitude?

He could not get out of his mind the conviction that he had seen this man, or such a man, sitting just that way in the saddle once in the past. His thoughts leaped to a decision.

"Come along with me; I'll feed you," he said, and led the way up the draw to his cabin.

The man put out his horse, drank deeply from the spring and followed Lang inside.

"What's your name?" demanded Lang, turning suddenly.

"Burt Condon," answered the other, and then compressed his lips.

He had been surprized into disclosing his identity.

But the disclosure had no effect upon Lang, and Condon breathed easier as he watched the preparations for supper.

"Lucky for you I did some cooking today," remarked Lang. "Here's beans that have boiled ever since morning; guess they're done—they're limas. Takes longer to boil beans up here——"

He halted in consternation.

"When you keep lettin' the fire go out," he added. "I'd just started her up again afore you come; that's how you saw the smoke."

"I see," said Condon. "Guess I'm lucky."

He watched Lang with a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes. He *was* lucky. To stumble upon him like this after he had lost the trail and all he had gone through!

Lang apparently didn't remember passing him as he sat his horse outside the saloon in Muddy the day of the shooting. That was good. Did Lang know there was a thousand dollars reward out for him and that the amount might be doubled and trebled when the posses returned empty-handed? Probably not.

Burt Condon could do a lot of things with a thousand dollars. It would more than make up the little stake he had lost in the Milk River homestead venture; it would clean up that little bad-check affair he had left behind in Chicago; it would mean a new fling. A thousand dollars! And he had the game all to himself.

Lang put the beans before Condon in the coffee-can in which he had boiled them.

"You'll have to use the cover of that can for a plate," he apologized. "I lost most of my plates and fixings coming up here from the South."

"Tough luck," grinned Condon. "Ain't been here long?"

"Just arrived, like yourself," answered Lang. "I prospect every Summer."

He felt that Nixon's idea that he had a claim in the draw was a good hunch.

"I was aiming to do some prospectin' myself," said Condon; "but I—I guess I'll go to work if I can find a job."

"Ain't there plenty of work down in the Flathead?"

"I like the mountains."

"You're travelin' pretty light," said Lang pointedly.

"I left in a hurry," said Condon simply, devoting his attention to the food.

He might better let Lang suspect that he, too, was a fugitive, than to permit his suspicions to rove in another and more dangerous direction.

Lang raised his brows. So that was it. The fellow had run away from the authorities like himself. Yet he couldn't get out of his head the impression that he had seen this man at some previous time. Still there was nothing in particular to stamp him as coming from the prairie country; although he felt that the man was lying when he said he came from the Flathead, which was west of the Rockies, across the range from the scene of Lang's exploits.

When Condon had finished he asked for tobacco, which Lang gave him.

"I'm sure much obliged for that meal," said Condon, who was genuinely thankful.

"Any man's welcome to share my grub as long as I've got any," said Lang, eying the other narrowly.

"And how far is it to the first settlement?" inquired Condon anxiously.

"Singing River's about five miles down," answered Lang. "Going there tonight?"

"Yes," said Condon; "an' I believe I'll be starting."

When Condon had gone Lang climbed the ridge south of the draw where he had a good view down the valley. The stars had come out in the heavens and the mountains were bathed in a soft glow. He saw Condon turn from the trail and enter some timber about a mile below.

"Now what——"

Lang cut his puzzled exclamation short.

"I'll be going down to Singing River myself in the morning," he concluded aloud.

XIII

BURT CONDON, with the thousand-dollar reward offered for Lang spurring him on, was nevertheless in a hard situation. He did not fancy taking any one else in on the deal and splitting the proceeds. He had misdirected the first posse for that reason.

Nevertheless he had no supplies, he had no money and he had no weapon. He had been penniless for weeks. He knew he could not capture Lang unless he got the drop on him. Even then he might have to wound him or even kill him, for he knew Lang was desperate and would fight regardless of odds.

After a night spent in the timber he decided the best thing to do was to go on to the town and endeavor to obtain some kind of employment or at least find a place to live temporarily until he could formulate and successfully carry out a plan to turn Lang over to the authorities without likelihood of losing any part of the reward money.

He might go over the divide and make the long trip for the sheriff; but there was a probability that the officer would demand a share of the money, and it was not unreasonable to assume that Lang might move in the mean time. Condon didn't know that Lang's saddle-horse was injured and that the fugitive had concluded the isolated Singing River country was as good a hiding-place as any for the present.

So in the early morning Condon made his

way down to the little cluster of cabins which Lang had dignified by calling a town. He entered the store, which was empty of both proprietor or customers, and passed into the little barroom.

Here Bransom and Frued were taking their first morning drinks and Kane was serving them. Condon had had long experience in saloons, but he was somewhat nonplused by the keen inspection to which he was subjected here. Nevertheless he walked up to the bar and addressed the man behind it.

"Any work to be had around here?" he asked.

"None as I knows of," replied Kane.

Bransom nudged the man Frued, who as usual hung in the background.

"What kind of work you lookin' for?" sneered Bransom.

"Anything," said Condon in a half-whine; "anything that'll bring in my keeps."

"Wasn't lookin' for any work aroun' cattle?"

"Ain't got any choice," was the sullen reply. "Anything that'll bring in some grub; I'm —— hungry."

"Well, Kane here's got grub—to sell," said Bransom with a gruff laugh.

"I'm willing to buy some soon's I can make some money," said Condon, looking at Kane.

The storekeeper, evidently puzzled but at the same time sympathetic, put out a bottle and a glass.

Condon poured himself a stiff drink and swallowed it hurriedly. Some of his ebbing courage—such as he possessed—returned. He kept his fingers twined about the bottle and looked at Kane both thankfully and inquiringly. Kane nodded and Condon took another big drink.

"I thought you was a mining man," jeered Bransom. "Broke! I never saw one yet that was worth a ——."

"Who told you I was a mining man?" demanded Condon as the liquor warmed his body and threatened to warp his judgment.

"If you ain't got a mining-claim up in that draw what in —— is your idea in puttin' a dead-line across the front of it?"

"Dead-line?" Condon was frankly bewildered.

"Yes, dead-line," shouted Bransom, encouraged by the other's apparent timidity and the fact that he was not armed. "You thought you was pullin' one —— of a strong play when you busted up here an' grabbed that draw an' announced you wasn't lookin' for visitors an' stuck out a bullet-line. Don't think you can pull any of that stuff on *me*—I'm immune, I am! People round here may think it's all right for you to protect your prospect-hole any way you want to; but I don't recognize no dead-lines!"

There was a light step in the open doorway which led into the store.

"Well, suppose you come up and start across it," rang a cool voice.

XIV

THE men whirled to face the doorway; but Lang's eyes, flashing with a sinister fire, ignored every one except Bransom. In the words and attitude of the dark-faced man he had sensed an enemy; and it was a time when he wanted his enemies out in the open.

In a flash Condon took in the situation with a sigh of relief. Bransom had mistaken him for Lang.

Lang stepped lightly into the room, his eyes still boring into Bransom's. His right hand hung lightly at his side where the butt of his big black gun protruded from its sheath.

Bransom also sensed that he had made a mistake.

"You the man from the upper draw?" he asked, scowling.

"I'm the man from the upper draw," said Lang. "You got any claim on that draw?"

"No more'n you have," returned Bransom.

"What do you mean by that?" shot Lang.

"Meaning that the draws is free in this country."

"Until some one take 'em up. Am I right?"

"You've taken that one up?"

Lang turned to Kane, the storekeeper.

"Is there any one hereabouts got any claim on that draw?"

"None's I know of," said Kane.

Lang again fixed his gaze upon Bransom.

"Yes, I've taken that one up. Got any objections?"

Bransom's face was black with baffled rage. He had hated this man before he saw him; hated him when he had learned that he had come into the upper valley and peremptorily laid claim to a part of it under mineral rights; hated him when he learned that he had met Alice Thornton——

"Can't say as I have since you've declared yourself," he forced himself to say.

"I'm glad you look at it that way," remarked Lang evenly.

Bransom's eyes narrowed to slits.

"Mining, I suppose," he sneered.

"That's it—mining."

"Must have a mighty valuable claim."

"Maybe I have an' maybe I ain't; but I've filed on that claim an' it ain't open to inspection."

"Working it?"

"That's for you to find out; but it won't pay you to be too curious."

Bransom remembered the talk of the dead-line.

"Mining ——!" he said to himself under his breath.

Lang had noticed that Condon was standing

beside the dark-faced man. Was there any connection between these two? He intended to find out. Meanwhile he purposed to strengthen the impression that he really had a mineral claim in the draw. This would explain his presence there and his desire for seclusion.

"I want to buy some supplies," he said to Kane.

"All right; I've got 'em to sell," said the storekeeper genially. "Need any tools?"

Lang started. If he was going to make his mining bluff good he would have to do some work; make a showing at least. Did they know he didn't have any tools? Condon did. But the cost!

"Yes, I can use some," he hesitated.

"I've got a second-hand outfit here that a fellow left on a bill," said Kane, leading the way into the store, "and I'll let you have it dirt cheap."

Lang bought it.

"You'll want some powder," said the storekeeper. "I've only got half a box of dynamite. Think that'll last you till I make the next trip out?"

"That'll do," said Lang, relieved.

Bransom was idling in front of the store. Without seeming to be watching, he was taking in every detail of the nature and extent of Lang's purchases.

Lang bought a bill of provisions and some cooking-utensils and dishes. A few personal needs concluded his requirements.

"How much is the damage, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Kane," supplied the storekeeper. "Let's see."

As he was figuring the amount Bransom returned to the saloon where the man Frued and Condon had remained.

"Sixty-three dollars," computed Kane.

"Who is that dark-faced fellow who was making the talk?" asked Lang as he paid his score out of the ninety dollars which he had remaining.

"Name's Bransom," said the storekeeper, making change and getting a cigar for his latest customer.

"Live hereabouts?" queried Lang.

"Lives up in the gulch back of town with the fellow that's out there with him—Frued," replied Kane.

"Seems down on mining," observed Lang.

"Seems to be," said the storekeeper.

"What does he do?"

"Runs a few cattle; that's 'bout all. Don't know much about him or his partner. Good many people up here I don't know much about."

Lang disregarded the subtle hint.

"That other fellow out there stopped up by my place last night; I was wondering if you knew him."

"Never seen him before this morning," said Kane, evidently suspicious of Lang's persistent questioning.

"I'll pack this stuff up on the horse I rode down," said Lang. "I left the pack-sacks out there by the door."

"Have a drink before you go?" invited Kane.

"All right," said Lang, who wished to reenter the barroom before leaving.

Bransom had evidently been helping himself, for he laid some money on the bar in payment.

"Queer boots for a prospector to be wearin'," he said in a loud aside to Frued.

"Nothing queer about the way I stand in 'em, is there?" flashed Lang.

He knew Bransom had intended him to overhear the remark.

"Good pair of ridin'-boots," was Bransom's only comment.

Lang turned toward Condon.

"Find work yet?"

"Not yet," said Condon uneasily.

"Still looking for it?"

"Still looking."

"All right; I'll give you a job helping me open up my mineral claim up there in the draw," snapped Lang.

Condon gasped and nearly dropped the glass he was holding. The others seemed interested.

"You say you'll—" began Condon.

"Give you a job—if *that's* what you're looking for," said Lang quietly.

Then he added—

"That's providin' you ain't too high-priced a man."

"Said he'd take anything that'd bring in some grub a few minutes ago," sneered Bransom.

"Suppose you mind your own business, Bransom, if you've got any," said Lang deliberately.

"Oh, I'm just glad to see a man get work if he wants it," smirked Bransom.

"I'll take the job," said Condon hastily. "An' I don't care what it pays."

Lang was still eying the dark-faced man and his partner.

"One of your duties will be to keep an eye and an ear out for chance visitors," he said meaningly. "I think it's pretty well understood around here that I don't intend to be bothered none. I hate to be bothered."

"Oh, we heard about your dead-line," said Bransom.

"And I want to tell you this, Bransom," said Lang earnestly as he stepped close to the other; "that dead-line goes. Now if you want trouble you know right where to find it."

Both men leaned a little back from the bar with their arms crooked and tense and looked into each other's eyes.

"Sometimes a man don't have to look for trouble—it comes to him," snarled Bransom.

"That works both ways, Bransom, and you know it."

"I ain't got nothin' just now to take me up into that draw you're so fussy about, but it's my own personal opinion that you ain't got anything up there that even looks like a mineral claim."

"Your opinion don't bother me none, Bransom; an' I don't figure to let *you* bother me none, either."

"Meaning you'd rather pick your own acquaintances?"

"You know very well what I mean, Bransom."

"Seems like you get acquainted mighty quick in *some* quarters." sneered Bransom.

"I don't get you," said Lang.

"Oh well, think it over, Mr. Langworth."

The angry blood leaped to Lang's throat. It was the name he had given the girl. Bransom had heard, and now he was casting a slur. There had been a glint of triumphant malice in his eyes when he had spoken the name. Lang's hand itched to go for his gun but instead he spoke in a calm, cool voice—

"Don't let it go any further than that, Bransom, or I'll give you a legitimate chance to test your draw."

Bransom with rage blazing from his eyes took the taunt in silence and remained motionless. In another moment his opportunity to answer the challenge seemed to have passed, for he relaxed.

Lang contemptuously turned his back partly upon him.

"You ready to go, Condon?" he asked.

"Why—yes," said Condon, hesitating.

"Then come on," snapped Lang as he led the way into the store.

With Condon assisting he filled the packsacks and then slung the load on the bay horse which he had ridden down. The tools he secured on top the pack. The dynamite was placed in the tops of the sacks. Lang led the animal and Condon followed on his horse. Thus they crossed the bridge and turned up the valley.

"Must be you don't take to prospectors," remarked Kane to Bransom when he had turned to the barroom.

"Prospector ——!" snarled Bransom. "With riding-boots, and talkin' about filin' a claim? Filin'! You didn't hear him mention the word 'locatin', did you?"

"Well what's a word got to do with it?" asked Kane.

"Just this much, you fool. 'Filin', is a prairie word—that man's from the lowlands."

"An' the other fellow's from the flat country, too," put in Frued.

"What's the idea in two men from the other side pullin' in here in the night and buryin' themselves in that draw?" asked Bransom in a low voice. "Prospectin'—with only two horses between 'em? Buying stuff here when they could have brung it in with 'em cheaper? What do you make out of it, Kane?"

"It's past me," answered Kane in a worried voice.

"Then you're a plumb fool," rasped Bransom. "I'm going to find out the meaning of that deadline.

XV

IN A small cabin in the narrow gulch behind the town Bransom and Frued sat at a table finishing their noon-day repast.

"I'd think we best lay off that fellow," Frued was saying.

Bransom responded with a flood of curses, but the other was unaffected by this display of passion.

"He as much as called the turn when you hinted that he might prefer women acquaintances to men—meaning, I suppose, that girl," Frued went on; "an' he was waitin' for you to make a move to draw."

"An' I came —— near boring him," said Bransom savagely.

"I dunno; that chap looks like he might be some on the draw himself. He's had experience on the range, I'd bet the last drop of liquor on earth."

"I'd have given him a chance to prove it if it hadn't been because——"

Bransom bit off his sentence with a click of his teeth.

"Because it would have meant that we'd have to move on, eh?" said Frued. "That would suit me. I think we've stayed here too long as it is."

"It ain't time to go yet."

"Bransom, can't you get that girl out of yore head? We could have got out of here a year ago if it hadn't been for——"

"Shut up!" roared Bransom. "I ain't holding you here. If you're so —— anxious to go why don't you clear out? It won't disturb me none if you want to break up this partner affair."

"That's all right; I'll stick," said Frued in a soothing voice. "Only there's nothing to be afraid of now that things has smoothed over, and any time yo're ready to go out we can go."

"I'll tell you when I'm ready," grumbled Bransom.

"Well, that's all right with me, Bransom; and I'm a-thinking you'll be ready to go before long."

With this remark Frued rose from the table and set about the work of clearing away the dishes.

Bransom left the cabin, saddled his horse and rode down to town. As he was preparing to alight in front of the store he saw a girl riding down the valley. Bransom smoothed his hair

and set his hat as he spurred his mount across the bridge and halted in the center of the trail.

"Howdy, Alice," he called as the girl drew near.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Bransom," she said without smiling.

"Going far, Alice?"

"Just over to the Millers' place—the little girl is sick."

"Care if I ride over with you, Alice?"

"Really, I don't want to take up your time, Mr. Bransom."

"But I like to have my time taken up by you," he persisted.

"It isn't far—and I'm in a hurry," said the girl as she urged her horse past Bransom.

He drove in his spurs and closed up the gap between them.

"Why is it you won't let me ride with you any more?" he asked.

"Really, Mr. Bransom!"

The girl seemed surprized.

"You never *did* ride very much with me, did you?"

"No, but lately I haven't rode with you at all," he complained. "You ain't mad because of what I said to you last—last week, are you?"

"I don't think you have any right to ask me such a question. And I'm certainly not going to answer it. Good-by."

Bransom whirled his horse about in swift anger as the girl rode down the valley on her errand.

He did not go into the store but continued up the valley.

When he had gone about three miles he turned sharply to the right and made his way to a little ranch-house which nestled under the brow of a high cliff beside a small stream at the edge of the timber on the western slope of the divide.

A large man, gray-haired, with his face and neck seamed and lined from exposure to the weather, was repairing a branding-iron at a crude forge near some corrals.

"Good day, John," greeted Bransom, who did not dismount.

"Hello, Bransom," answered the gray-haired man.

"Hear you've got a neighbor a mile or so above," remarked Bransom in a casual tone.

John Thornton straightened and puckered his brow.

"So old man Nixon was telling me. Prospector, ain't he?"

"That's what he says," answered Bransom dryly. "Says he's a prospector. Got a fellow with him who made a stall down to Kane's this morning that he was lookin' for work an' the other—Langworth he calls himself—made the play good by hiring him."

"Figurin' on doing some work in there, eh?"

"That seems to be the way he wants it to 'pear. But this pair is wearing ridin'-boots an their talk goes back to the flat country, John."

"Yeh?" Thornton's brow clouded.

"Came in in the night an' announced they didn't want no visitors. Langworth's got a dead-line drawed across the front of the gulch for a bullet-mark. Guess they came in pretty light, for he was buying supplies down at Kane's this morning. Wears his gun low an' handy."

"Ah. Well, it ain't the first time strangers has drifted in here in the night an' left the same way."

"But I reckon this pair expects to stay a while," said Bransom as he built a cigaret.

"Where they from?" asked Thornton seriously.

Bransom laughed.

"Ask me something easy; they ain't revealin' their last address."

"Well, what d'ye make of it, Bransom?"

"Nothin'—only you know this ain't a mineral country, John."

"I dunno. Nixon's got some mighty li ely-lookin' samples."

"Yes, but Nixon's a miner pure an' simple—been at it all his life. An' he ain't young, an' he don't wear ridin'-boots and spurs, an' he don't say 'file' on a claim instead of 'locate,' an' he don't roll cigarets with one hand like he was used to doin' it in the saddle."

John Thornton frowned and shook his head.

"You got some mighty fine-breeded cattle up here, John; an' I've got some myself," said Bransom pointedly.

"By ——! If any man ever rustled a head of my stock I'd——"

"Same here, John. I just thought maybe we might as well keep our eyes open; that's all. An'—yes, there's something else."

Bransom hesitated, watching the other closely.

"What's that, Bransom?"

"I think this fellow Langworth thinks he's something of a ladies' man."

Thornton clenched his fists and took a step forward.

"Understand, I'm just of that opinion, John. Well, I'll be trailing."

Bransom rode away, leaving Thornton standing gripping a rail of the corral with a fearsome gleam in his eyes.

Bransom crossed Singing River and entered the timber on the west slope of the valley. He continued on to the summit of the first ridge and followed this to a point directly opposite the draw wherein Lang had taken refuge. He saw smoke rising from beneath the jagged crags at the upper end of the draw; and for the remainder of the afternoon and until after the sun had set he remained upon the ridge watching the draw opposite.

Just as the first deep shades of the mountain

twilight were falling he saw three horses in a meadow within the draw. These were the two horses Lang had brought into the hills—the saddle-mount being lame—and Condon's horse.

"Three horses!" Bransom exclaimed to himself. "Then there's three of 'em!"

His eyes widened as he muttered to himself. Night was gathering above the peaks and the first stars were out when Bransom crossed Singing River at a point above the draw and slowly passed the screen of silver firs on his way down the valley. He listened and peered within but could hear or see nothing.

Below the draw where the south flange of the gulch made a ridge on the east slope of the valley, he reined in his horse, rolled a cigaret in deep meditation and snapped a match into flame with his thumb-nail.

There was no wind, no sound; only the brooding stillness of the forests and the solitude of the high hills. He held the flame of the match to his cigaret without responding to the instinct to cup his palm.

The jarring crack of a pistol broke the silence and a bullet whistled through the flame, knocking the cigaret from his lips.

With a wild curse of consternation Bransom drove home his spurs and dashed down the valley, flinging a futile look of hate and fury not unmixed with fear over his shoulder as he fled.

XVI

LANG entered the cabin to find Condon examining the rifle. Condon hastily replaced the gun and turned to the stove.

"What do you think of it?" asked Lang, nodding toward the rifle.

"It's a good gun," said Condon. "I was just looking it over; it's my favorite model. By the way, I thought I heard a shot just now down by the mouth of the draw."

He looked at Lang inquiringly.

"A skunk," returned Lang, smiling. "I kicked up the dust close to his nose to see him run."

"I see."

Condon lit another candle and put it on the table.

"Shall we eat?"

"You bet," laughed Lang. "Did you put the biscuits in the oven?"

For reply Condon opened the oven door and drew out a pan filled with biscuits, light and fluffy and perfectly browned.

"You sure can mix biscuit batter," he grinned at Lang.

"Batter biscuits are as good any day as the other kind; crinklier crust and easier to make. All right, old-timer; sling the grub!"

Condon put the biscuits on the table. Then followed a covered pan which had been simmering on the back of the stove. It contained a fat grouse which Lang had cut into pieces, fried a little and then baked in the oven with slices of bacon and small browned potatoes. The bottom of the pan was full of rich gravy.

Condon's mouth watered as he uncovered this dish.

A dish of canned tomatoes with pieces of bread-crust stewed in them came next and a pail of stewed apricots for dessert.

Condon set the plates, knives and forks, spoons, salt and pepper and a half-pound cake of butter on the table. The butter was cold and firm, having been kept in a pail in the spring since it had been brought from the store down the valley.

Then he poured two big cups of steaming black coffee.

"You forgot the canned cow," observed Lang as he sat down at the table.

Condon hurriedly secured a can of evaporated cream from the shelf cupboard.

"Now let's go to it," said Lang, helping himself to a leg of the grouse, three of the crusty, juicy, browned potatoes and a biscuit.

Condon needed no second invitation; nor did he take time to make any remarks during the meal. And when the pair had finished, everything except the dishes had disappeared.

"I don't believe you've had a square meal in a month," said Lang with a grin when they had finished.

"An' that comes pretty near bein' the truth," confessed Condon.

Lang eyed the other speculatively as they rolled their after-supper smokes. Again he felt the vague impression that somewhere at some time he had seen this man. He noted the apparent marks of dissipation on the other's face.

"You've been hitting it up some, haven't you?

Condon avoided Lang's searching gaze as he replied—

"Yes, I have."

"There are only three things that booze is good for," said Lang, blowing a cloud of smoke toward the sapling rafters.

"Gee! I didn't know it was good for anything."

Condon's answer surprized himself.

"Yes," said Lang, "it's good for three things. When a man comes in from a long ride in a cold rain or a blizzard one lone drink is just the thing to bring him out of it and put him in shape for a good meal. After the meal he forgets about the drink an' goes to sleep."

He watched Condon carefully as the man digested this remark.

"They don't have blizzards up here, do they?" asked Condon, forgetting himself.

"I don't suppose they do," smiled Lang. "An' the second thing that whisky is good for is to make a man drunk."

Condon couldn't resist a smile at this.

"That's the main reason, ain't it?"

"Maybe it is," said Lang. "But a good many use it to drown their troubles in and forget the things they did when they were drunk before by getting drunk again."

Condon now was regarding Lang with indubitable attention.

"There's just two questions I want to ask you, Condon," said Lang earnestly. "You don't have to answer them, but I'd rather you would. The worst you can get is fired."

Condon stirred uneasily.

The candle-light flickered against the rough, partly chinked log walls of the cabin. Live coals glowed in the narrow grate. Outside the wind was stirring in the pines and the cold light of the stars bathed the far-flung ridges in silver. Inside was a home-like, luxurious comfort. Condon watched Lang's features as the man from the ranges looked out the window.

A thousand dollars! But even as he thought of it Condon shuddered.

"What is it you want to ask me?" he said, wetting his dry lips.

"You're not a horse-thief or a rustler, are you?"

"No!" cried Condon in quick relief.

Lang had expected this answer. It had nothing to do with his idea in offering Condon employment. He was naturally suspicious of the newcomer, and had that morning suddenly decided to test the latter's statement that he was looking for work. If he was other than he purported to be, Lang wanted him where he could watch him. And he had still another reason, which he himself was not sure he could analyze.

"Condon," said Lang, leaning his elbows on the table and peering intently at the man, "I don't suppose the law would come into this country looking for anybody without taking the precaution to bring along a gun, eh?"

"I have no gun," said Condon quickly.

"That ain't just what I'm a-tryin' to get at," said Lang dryly.

"And I ain't an officer," said Condon truthfully.

"That's as much as I'd expect you to ask of me an' get any answer, so we'll let it go at that," said Lang.

He rose, went to the door and looked out. Turning back into the room, he said:

"There's a tarp over there in the corner; that an' my slicker an' mackinaw an' saddle-blankets will have to do you for a bed. I'll use the blanket in my outfit. That, on top of the pine mattress we've built, ought to do us. It ain't going to be very cold in here. Take this butter out to the spring, will you?"

While Condon was gone on this errand Lang deftly ejected the cartridges from the magazine of the rifle.

"Condon," said Lang when the other returned, "do you know anything about powder?"

"Not a thing except not to pet it with a sledge-hammer or anything like that."

"Well, you can use a pick and shovel and maybe drill a few holes," Lang reflected aloud. "We'll start work on my prospect tomorrow."

Condon began the task of washing the supper dishes.

They arranged their beds and Lang blew out the candles. When he rolled up in his blanket his six-shooter pressed hard and cold against his side.

From the bunk on the other side of the cabin near the stove Condon lay with his head pillowed upon his right arm and watched the wavering gleams of the dying coals where they flickered on the dull metal of the rifle in the corner.

One thousand dollars! Well, Lang had set the price upon his own head; why should it matter who collected it? And Condon needed the money.

XVII

"WE'LL start in right here," said Lang the next morning when the two were inspecting the apex of the triagle formed by the head of the draw.

"Somebody once dug in a ways here," he pointed out; and sure enough a prospect-hole, partly filled with rock and earth, showed plainly at the base of the high cliff.

"Dig that out while I take a look around and tomorrow we'll put in a shot of dynamite," Lang continued. "Might as well let 'em know we mean business up here."

Condon started to work with pick and shovel, cleaning out the old prospect-hole as directed.

Lang walked half-way down the draw and then climbed the steep slope which formed the south side. He disappeared in the timber.

Condon worked for about an hour with the sweat running off his face in streams. His hands and arms were shaking as if with ague when he finally dropped the shovel and straightened his aching back. Already the blisters were raising in his palms.

He wiped his face and swore.

"This is earning it, —— him," he muttered. "He's going to pay better wages than he thinks for this."

He went to the spring for a drink. On the moss beside the cool well of water formed by a deep depression in solid rock he sat and a cunning light came into his eyes. He rolled a cigaret and then went to the cabin. Instinctively he reached for the rifle in the corner and threw down the lever, at the same time covering the top of the breach with his hand to catch the cartridge which should be ejected. He intended to see that the gun was in good working order.

But no cartridge was ejected by the mechanism. He worked the lever again before he realized that the magazine was empty.

"Dry as a bone!" he exclaimed to himself.

He replaced the rifle and looked out the door and windows to make sure that Lang was not returning. Then he explored Lang's effects, searched about his bunk and looked everywhere about the cabin where there might be a hiding-place.

But he could find no trace of any rifle cartridges.

Meanwhile Lang had climbed the high ridge on the south of the draw to the shoulder of the main divide. Far below him a thin ribbon of silver, Singing River, wound through the fertile little upper valley and disappeared in a narrow cleft in a rocky barrier at its southern end.

Above him to the north a faulted range led off from the divide at his back and joined with the western ridge. Thus the upper valley was shut in, cupped in the hills, with the great, glistening peaks standing sentinel.

When he had familiarized himself with the lay of the land he started for the top of the divide. Perhaps from the high, rugged, bare backbone of the Rockies he could catch a glimpse of the prairie country far to the northeast from which he had been driven. But he changed his mind and went down the south side of the ridge toward the lower end of the valley.

In this way he came upon a little ranchhouse nestling at the base of some high cliffs at the edge of the timber. He started to circle, entered a grove of young spruce, emerged into a small clearing, and came face to face with Alice Thornton, who was petting a beautiful horse.

The girl, although startled, nodded to him in greeting.

"Good morning, Miss Alice; I've been up on the ridge taking a look around an' thought I would walk down this way to the river an' back home. I didn't know there was a ranch here."

"This is our place," she said gravely.

"I'm sure I don't want to trespass," smiled Lang, who now remembered to remove his hat.

He looked almost boyish with his smile and the sun shining in his hair.

"Friends do not trespass," she answered, stroking the nose of the horse and regarding him seriously.

"You consider me a friend then?" asked Lang eagerly.

"One has to prove himself a friend before he is entitled to such consideration, doesn't he?" she countered.

"I see. But won't you believe me when I say that I would welcome the chance to prove a—friend—of yours?"

"People who wish to be friendly ordinarily do not draw dead-lines and threaten gunplay if they should have visitors, do they?"

Lang stepped back. Who had told her of that? The man who had learned his assumed name from her? Bransom?

Lang's brow clouded and she took note of the fact, for with a patting caress for the horse she turned away.

"Miss Alice!" called Lang.

She turned, and the questioning look upon her face made her more exquisitely beautiful than he had imagined any woman could be. She was dressed in plain blue; but the garment she wore showed to rare advantage her charm of form, even though it lacked the finesse of lines and workmanship which might have been accomplished by an experienced modiste. Somehow Lang knew that she had made the dress herself.

"Miss Alice, we said something about circumstances the other day," said Lang in a low voice, vibrant with feeling; "and there are circumstances in my case which I can not explain to you. That—that—dead-line—is the result. We do not draw lines to ward off our friends."

"Then you mean you have enemies here?"

She appeared surprized.

"I didn't know you were acquainted around Singing River."

"I have reason to believe I have one enemy, at least——"

Lang was sorry the moment the words were out.

Her eyes were wide with questioning.

"But I am not worying about enemies," said Lang hastily.. "I merely would like powerful well to have you believe a little in me—which I agree seems hard the way things stand."

"There seems to be a geat deal of mystery about you, Mr. Langworth."

Lang squirmed; and then humor—the humor of the roundup camp and the open range—came to his rescue. He laughed heartily.

"Yes, I reckon there is, Miss Alice," he said.

She found it hard to resist that laugh. It seemed impossible that a man who could laugh like that in the face of the suspicions which he evoked could be very bad.

"I'll tell you what, Miss Alice; you just pretend that you've known me a long time—that you know who I am, where I come from, and all about me—and that you know nothing worse about me than that I've made a mistake or two."

"What kind of mistakes?" she asked doubtfully, smiling nevertheless.

"The worst you can imagine," said Lang gaily.

"That might be doing you an injustice," the girl reflected.

"An' you saying that is a compliment,"

Lang returned, surprized because he found it easy to talk to this wonderful girl. "There's just one thing I would like to ask you. What is it that makes you so different from any girl I've ever met?"

His eyes showed that he was honestly puzzled.

"Different?"

She in turn was frankly perplexed.

"Yes, different," asserted Lang stoutly. "You don't seem to talk like other girls I've known; and it isn't so much what you say as how you say it. Where did you get your learning?"

"My mother," she said.

"She must be a wonderful woman."

"She is dead," said the girl wistfully. "Father and I live here alone. I was born here. Mother came from the prairies. Father wouldn't live anywhere except in the mountains; and I have never known anything else."

"From the prairies!" exclaimed Lang. "Now I know what it is that makes you—different. You're the spirit of the range with the wisdom of these old hills. No wonder you are beautiful."

"You mustn't say that," she reproved.

"But it's true, an' if it wasn't true I'd never say it. I'd rather keep still than lie."

She looked at him quickly.

"Is that why— Does that perhaps explain your dead-line?"

It was a bold question, and Lang felt the force of it.

"Maybe—maybe not," he said vaguely. "But I hope that talk of the line will not stop you from coming up there to pick flowers again."

A wave of color swept over her face.

"That is hardly an appropriate remark, do you think, Mr. Langworth?"

She turned toward the lower edge of the clearing.

"Wait!" stammered Lang. "I—I didn't mean it—that way. I meant you were welcome and no one will bother you——"

The explanation, however, seemed a useless bit of talk.

"I think you are sensible enough to understand," he ended.

"I'll try to," she replied doubtfully as they walked through the spruces and came out upon the wide slope of the valley.

"I'll be hittin' for the camp," said Lang. "We're opening a prospect-hole up there. Good-by."

She did not answer, but watched as he swung up the slope toward the ridge on the south side of the draw.

As she turned toward the south end of the timber which screened the Thornton ranch-house Bransom came out from within the shelter of the trees, leading his horse.

XVIII

"SEE you've got a new friend, Alice," he greeted.

"Mr. Bransom, what were you doing there—spying?" she demanded with a look of contempt.

"I wouldn't call it spyin'," said Bransom. "Just call it takin' precautions. I was up on the ridge keeping an eye on the cattle hereabouts when I saw him sneaking down this way. Your dad's got some mighty fine cattle in here, Alice."

"What do you mean?" she flared in indignation. "Has my father hired you to watch his cattle?"

"Oh, no; but I've got a few in here myself. An' one can't be too careful when there are mysterious strangers around who wear ridin'-boots and spurs an' hosses that ain't branded."

"So that's it. You think Mr. Langworth is a cattle-thief?"

"I ain't makin' any accusations," evaded Bransom; "but as I said, I just aim to be careful. Nobody ever lost any cattle if he watched 'em close enough."

"Have you told my father of this—your precautions?"

"I think your father knows."

"And I think he is able to look after his cattle himself; you haven't any stock on this ranch."

"I was just cutting across; I came up the ridge behind your place."

"Spying!" she said with fine scorn. "Have you told this man of your suspicions to his face? He says he is mining up there."

"He don't look like a mining man, an' he don't act like a minin' man," said Bransom almost harshly. "I know the lowland breed. What's he here for? Giving you a cock-and-bull story about——"

"That will do, Mr. Bransom; you need not connect me in any way with this affair."

"No? But he has done just that. Are you on this fellow's side, Alice?"

"You needn't call me Alice; and I do not take sides against any one until I have justifiable reasons for doing so. I wouldn't hint dark things about a man behind his back unless I could prove them to his face."

"Oh, that's all right," said Bransom with a forced laugh. "I'm not accusin' any one. You look awful sweet today, Alice."

"I will not listen to such statements from you."

Anger but served to heighten the effect of her charms upon Bransom. He dropped the reins of his horse and took a step toward her. She drew back, but he ignored this.

"Alice, what do you think I have stayed up here in this forsaken country for more than a year for?"

"I understood you were running some stock in here," she replied coldly. "And this isn't a forsaken country unless you make it so in your own mind."

She was standing away from him on the south side. His back was to the north. He apparently had forgotten his horse.

"I brung a few head of stock in here, yes," he said; "but I just intended to fatten 'em up and drive 'em over the western range to a new market last Fall. Instead I stayed all Winter an' all Spring an' into the middle of this Summer; an' you was the cause of it."

"Me?" She arched her brows.

"Yes, you. You know I was stuck on you the first time I ever saw you, an' I meant it when I told you that night a while back that I wanted you for a wife. Haven't I got any chance?"

"You have absolutely no chance—not the most remote possibility of a chance," she answered evenly and with an air of positive finality.

"I thought I had a chance until this—this—whatever he is came in here and——"

"There was no reason you should have assumed you had a right to think that," said the girl. "I never gave you any encouragement. I merely treated you kindly, as I would treat any one else."

"But you didn't turn me down, Alice; you——"

"Turn you down?" she laughed. "I didn't know you were paying court to me, Mr. Bransom, or I would have discouraged you—your attentions—a long time ago."

"But you didn't discourage 'em," declared Bransom, his face darkening and becoming distorted with the violence of his passion. "Whether you intended to or not you encouraged me until I had a right to expect——"

"Don't say it!" she warned as her eyes flashed with anger and indignation. "You've said enough. And now that you know just what the situation is, go!"

"You can't be shut of me this easy," he cried, leaping toward her in a frenzy of abandon.

"Bransom!"

The man twisted in his tracks to see Lang running toward them along the edge of the timber. His hand flashed toward the pistol at his side, but hung there motionless when Lang beat him to the draw.

Without looking at the girl, Lang faced Bransom, keeping him covered.

"I take it from what I saw—an' maybe it was lucky I stopped to look back—that this young lady ain't none too anxious for your company; if she is she can speak up an' I'll beat it the way I come."

There was a long moment of silence.

"I don't hear anything, Bransom, so I guess *you* better beat it. There's your horse. You're liable to find it mighty onhealthy if you amble up this end of the range again. On your way; an' lest you might want to take a chance with that gun of yours when you hit the saddle, I'll tell you I'm tolerably fair on moving targets."

"Gunman, eh?"

Bransom flashed a look at the girl, but what he saw in her face merely served to increase his feeling of baffled rage. He swung into the saddle and dashed away. Lang turned to the girl.

"I happened to look back an' saw that fellow come sneakin' out of the timber. I watched him for a time, wonderin' how he happened to be around that way, leadin' his horse. Then I saw you backin' away from him with a disagreeable sort of look on your face—if you *could* look that way—an' I came a-running."

She flashed him a grateful look and hesitated before she spoke.

"He was annoying me," she confessed; "and he was hinting something very uncomplimentary about you."

"That don't surprize me none," laughed Lang. "I don't know what he got it in for me so sudden for, an' I don't care so long as he keeps away from me. If he don't——"

He left the sentence unfinished and put away his gun.

"Don't you care to hear what he said about you?" she asked in some astonishment.

"Not unless you believe it," smiled Lang.

The girl's face appeared troubled.

"But I think you ought to know, because it is serious, and if it isn't true——"

She looked then as if she might hope it would prove untrue.

"He intimated that you were a— That is——"

She faltered and then looked at him intently as she spoke deliberately—

"That you were in here because of the cattle."

Lang whistled softly and his eyes glinted.

"Do you believe him?"

"I won't if you will deny it and tell me all about yourself."

Lang remained silent, studying this beautiful girl and marveling that some subtle impulse prompted him to confide in her; to tell her everything. He looked across the valley with its tints of green and blue, splashed with the blossoms of the wild mountain flowers, bathed in dazzling sunlight with the velvet of the pines behind. A sweet-scented breeze followed the course of the river and little side-currents of air stirred upon the slope.

Freedom! If he told her all he could no longer remain a fugitive. He would have to give himself up to retain honor in her eyes. And in that case Drayton's friends, aided by

Hemp's followers, would do the rest. Freedom! It was the very breath of life to him.

"I can't tell you that," he said finally in a faint voice, fixing his gaze upon the ground.

When he looked up she was gone.

XIX

BRANSOM flung himself from his horse before the store and entered swiftly. Without a glance about the place he stamped to the doorway leading into the barroom and entered. Nixon and Frued were there, and two others—men who had apparently come down from some near-by section as they had some purchases with them on the bar.

"I've got that fellow's number up the valley," announced Bransom as he motioned to Kane to serve him with drink.

"What did you find out?" asked Frued.

"That he's a gunman and probably a cattle-thief," said Bransom viciously as he tossed off his liquor.

Kane flashed a startled glance at the speaker.

"What makes you think that, Bransom?"

"Because he was out scouting in the hills up around old John Thornton's place today an' seemed to be payin' particular attention to the cattle."

Bransom knew this was a lie, but Lang could not deny he had been out on the range if he should hear of it.

The little group of men gathered before Bransom, who took several drinks, filling his glass nearly four fingers high each time. As the fiery liquor increased the stimulation caused by his anger and the experience of the morning, a plan of procedure flamed in his brain.

His eyes narrowed as he ignored questions put to him and deliberately set about the evil business he had resolved upon as both a means of revenge and of getting Lang out of the way. As Bransom had told the girl, he had not remained a year in that section without reason.

"Yes," he continued; "he was out on old John Thornton's range this morning, sizing up John's stock an' gettin' the lay of the land. An' there's three of them up in that draw—this fellow who calls himself Langworth, the man who came down here yesterday to look around and who the other fellow hired as a play to pull the wool over our eyes, are there, and one more who we ain't got a look at yet."

"How do you know there's another up there?" asked Kane.

"I saw his horse," said Bransom. "The three of 'em had a horse apiece when they came in here. Didn't they have to come down here for supplies?"

"There may be three of 'em up there." commented Kane; "but what did they want to buy mining-tools for if——"

"To fool us," interrupted Bransom. "Ridin'-boots and spurs and lightnin' gun-play ain't in keepin' with what prospectin' mavericks I've seen nosing aroun' the hills."

Frued and the two beside him nodded. Nixon and Kane appeared thoughtful.

"There's some mighty valuable stock in here," continued Bransom. "Three men could gather a bunch, run 'em into an elk-trail, get 'em over the divide and out before we'd miss 'em, what with the cattle scattered in the meadows in the timber and us asleep. An' this fellow Langworth was getting a line on things today by looking over John Thornton's stock."

A heavy step in the doorway into the store drew the attention of the group as John Thornton entered.

"What's that yo're sayin' about my stock, Bransom?"

"Nothin', only that fellow Langworth what's camping up there in the draw above your place with two others was takin' a good look at your cattle today."

"Wal, I've got a few head that would make anybody look."

"He seemed to be inspectin' the range and the trails up back of your place pretty well. We was just sayin' that three experienced cowhands who was also slick with their guns wouldn't have much trouble runnin' a bunch of stock out of here if they knew nobody was watchin' 'em."

" ——! If a rustler ever came into this valley——"

John Thornton finished his exclamation by bringing a hard fist down on the bar with a force which made the glasses jump.

"An' if three of 'em came?"

Bransom put the significant question with an evil leer.

"You mean you have cause to think those men up there are rustlers?" thundered the old cattleman.

"I've got reasons a-plenty for some mighty healthy suspicions," asserted Bransom.

Thornton was silent while Kane explained the nature of Lang's purchases the morning before.

"Mining!" said Thornton with the natural antagonism the cattleman feels for any activity which threatens the peace of the range.

"So they'd like to have us believe," jeered Bransom. "Mining men with prairie dust hanging to their ridin'-boots an' thumbs wore smooth fanning the hammers of six-guns! This fellow Langworth is a gun-fighter."

"Eh?" cried Thornton, his face darkening.

"I was up your way this morning," explained Bransom coldly, "lookin' over the range to see if any of my cattle had strayed over that way; an' I see this Langworth up on the ridge first an' then cuttin' down through your ranch.

"When he reached the meadow in them spruces north of the house he came on Miss Alice an' said some words to her. She walked away from him through the spruces to the open slope of the valley, with him follerin' her an'—pesterin' her."

"What's that yo're saying?" cried Thornton, leaning toward Bransom.

"Wait till I get through, John, an' then think on your own account. I saw Miss Alice wanted to get away from him so I hurried to catch up to them. He pulled a gun on me, an' seeing I wasn't courtin' suicide I got into the saddle an' come away when I saw that Miss Alice had got a good start for the house while this was going on."

"By ——!" John Thornton drew back as if he had been struck.

A serious look had come into the faces of the others in the place. Even Kane compressed his lips and Nixon glanced about grimly.

"I guess it's about time I paid that draw up there a visit," said John Thornton.

"You don't want to go up there alone," cautioned Bransom quickly with a gleam of triumph in his eyes. "There's three of 'em up there. Frued and I will go along with you an' maybe——"

He looked about with a significant glance of inquiry.

The others nodded silently.

"Remember, there's supposed to be a dead-line across that draw," Bransom pointed out. "We've got to be careful."

"Dead-line or no dead-line, I'm goin' up thar!" thundered Thornton, starting for the door.

"We'll trail along with you," said Kane quickly.

XX

WHEN Lang returned to the draw he found Condon working furiously in the old prospect-hole. The sweat was streaming from his face and he paused now and then to swear with a will which attested to the enraged state of his mind.

"C'mon out of there," called Lang with a grin. "Don't you figure on stopping to eat?"

Condon looked up surprized. "There's a —— of a lot of rock here," he observed, wiping the sweat from his eyes.

"All right, you go up an' start a fire so we can get some grub cooked an' I'll put in a few shots of powder in the cracks in the rocks back there. That'll beat picking an' shoveling."

The rear of the prospect-hole, where it dipped down against the rock, was comparatively clear. Lang had learned how to handle dynamite when building irrigation dams in the prairie country.

He returned to the cabin with Condon, and while the latter began preparations for a meal he went back to the prospect-hole with two sticks of dynamite, caps, and fuse.

"What I want is a —— of a racket up here to let 'em know we're doing something," he said aloud to himself as he placed the two sticks of explosive in favorable places and packed them in with soft clay.

He adjusted the caps and trained a fuse from each. Then he went back to the cabin.

When the two men had finished eating they rested for a time and smoked.

"I believe you look better than when you blew in," said Lang, observing Condon closely. "Your eyes are clearer and your complexion is better. I guess the mountains agree with you."

Condon merely grunted. He was enjoying his smoke. But he realized that he felt better for the exercise he had had that morning.

His thoughts flashed back over the months since he had located his homestead in the Milk River country. He had made the mistake of endeavoring to get a piece of land merely by filing on it. Like hundreds of others he had failed for lack of moderate capital to tide him over until he could get in a crop and realize something from the soil. He had thought it was but a question of getting the land free and the farm would grow.

But with the thousand dollars— He studied Lang with fresh interest. Where had Lang hidden the rifle-cartridges?

"You don't want to take it too heavy—work too hard, I mean," Lang was saying. "There isn't very much money with this outfit, an' you won't have a job with me long; but it'll tide you over until you can get your bearings."

Condon winced at this.

"Somehow or other I got a hunch that neither of us figures on remaining any great length of time in here," continued Lang dreamily.

He had his own unpleasant memory of the end of his meeting with Alice Thornton that morning.

Still Condon remained silent.

"Let's go up and shoot that blast I've got in the rocks," said Lang suddenly. "There's no particular use in waitin', do you think?"

They left the cabin and went up to the prospect-hole.

As Ross dropped down into the excavation Condon paused to listen. He thought he had caught the sound of horses down below the draw. But the silence of the hills was unbroken and as Lang jumped up beside him he decided he had been mistaken.

"C'mon, be fast; let's get over there behind those rocks before that blast," shouted Lang as he ran for shelter.

Condon followed him, and a minute after they gained the safety of the protecting ledge and the rock-barrier before it the mountains

seemed to shake with the force of the explosion of the dynamite.

They ran back to the prospect-hole through a shower of small stones and gravel. When the dust and smoke had cleared they entered the hole, now widened and deepened and strewn with rock débris. There was a great, gaping, V-shaped crack in the face of the wall which gleamed like a white gravestone.

As Lang stooped to examine the damage wrought by the blast a sharp command rang from the outer rim of the prospect-hole—

"Put up your hands down there, you two, an' come out here!"

Lang and Condon whirled to find themselves looking into the black bores of half a dozen guns.

"Put 'em up," repeated John Thornton, "or we'll bore you full of lead!"

Condon elevated his hands above his head and clambered quickly out before the men.

Lang stood perfectly still in the center of the hole with his hands hanging loosely at his sides. He knew he was hopelessly outnumbered but his eyes were cold and hard, and a smile that was partly a curling of his lips in scorn mocked the men above.

The blast, which had aided Thornton and his men to approach, was followed by a deep silence, and this silence now seemed to hang heavier and heavier upon the little group. Condon stared in dismay at Lang, standing there in the bottom of the prospect-hole, and a glint of admiration came into his eyes.

"If you reckon you've got good reason why don't you bore away?" said Lang in a low, cool voice that carried distinctly to each of the men above.

"By ——!" exclaimed Thornton, lowering his rifle.

The others kept Lang covered.

Thornton leaped down into the depression among the rocks and stood before Lang.

"We're going to ask you three questions," he said: "an' yore answers'll show us if we've got reason or not. Who are you, an' where'd you come from, an' what're you doing up here?"

Lang actually laughed, and Condon, who was watching the scene in fascination, thought he caught a note of relief in Lang's ill-placed merriment.

"I'm a stranger in these hills," said Lang quietly but clearly, "from the ranges to the north, and your ears and your eyes should tell you what I'm doing."

"You were on my range this morning lookin' at my stock," accused Thornton grimly.

"Your range?"

"My range an' my ranch—I'm John Thornton."

"I see," said Lang.

His gaze swept the circle of armed men above —Frued, Nixon, Kane and two he did not know. Bransom did not appear among the men.

"We don't aim to have strangers coming in here from anywhere lookin' over our cattle or trespassing on our property," said Thornton; "an' we don't aim to have them botherin' our women-folks."

"Ah!"

Lang's eyes flashed fire for an instant.

"What makes you think I was looking over your cattle?"

"You were seen on my ranch looking at my stock and annoying my daughter," thundered Thornton in a deep voice.

"The man who told you that lied, Thornton," cried Lang.

"I know him an' I don't know you," answered Thornton sternly. "Where's the third man who is in here with you?"

"There ain't but two of us here," replied Lang, surprized; "Condon there an' myself. What makes you think there's another here?"

"You've got three horses," said Thornton.

"Sure—two to ride an' one to pack. They're in the meadow below here if you want to look 'em over. My saddle-horse is lame."

"We'll look at 'em, all right. But we don't aim to have no gun-fighters comin' in here and drawing dead-lines; that's another thing, stranger."

"What gives you the idea I'm a gun-fighter?"

"You proved it yerself this morning."

"I ain't figurin' on lettin' any man draw ahead of me if I can help it," said Lang. "That's a common failing, ain't it?"

"We haven't had a killin' in the upper valley for a long spell," said Thornton; "an' we're not goin' to wait for the law if we have one now—we'll use a rope!"

Nixon climbed down into the hole and began inspecting the rock wall and the crack widened by the blast.

Neither Thornton nor Lang took any notice of him.

"If there are any killings I don't reckon to be the corpse, Thornton, rope or no rope!" declared Lang.

"You carry a mighty slick gun, I hear," returned Thornton.

"Want to see it?"

In the flash of an eye Lang's gun lay in his palm, butt outward, for Thornton's inspection.

The cattleman was taken aback. A gunman deliberately offering his weapon? Disarming himself even temporarily?

There was a startled exclamation from Nixon.

"Silver-bearing quartz!" exclaimed the old miner. "Look here, Thornton; that last shot has uncovered a fault. What'd I tell you 'bout silver in these hills? Here's a fissure with a thin vein carryin' wire silver. Look!"

Both Thornton and Lang stared in astonishment while Nixon pointed excitedly to a thin black line in the white rock.

"There's a mine down there with ore rich enough to pack out on mules!" exclaimed the prospector. "I've alers said this was a mineral country an' now, by ——, here's positive proof."

Lang replaced his gun as Nixon bent down before the exposed vein in the quartz.

"Maybe you *have* got a claim, an' a good one," said Thornton to Lang in a voice that did not carry beyond; "but I warn you off my place. Until you come out like a man an' tell me what I want to know about yourself don't come on my property an' don't speak to my daughter. If you do I'll kill you on sight myself."

"I suppose you have the right to make those terms," said Lang.

"An' the courage to live up to 'em," said Thornton, turning to go.

"There's just one thing," drawled Lang, waving aside the excited Nixon and looking John Thornton in the eyes. "I'm goin' to tell that fellow he lied."

XXI

LANG stood on the brink of the prospect-hole when the others had gone. Condon watched him a few moments, still under the spell of some weird fascination, then he went to the cabin. The sun had gone down in a blaze of glory and the soft, purple twilight of the high hills was drawing its shades over the valley.

From the rock jetties above the south wall of the draw the sharp crack of a pistol shattered the silence.

Lang's hat was torn from his head as a bullet crashed through its crown.

He leaped into the shelter of the trees and ran down past the cabin toward the mouth of the draw. Half-way down he swerved, crossed the draw to the south side and ran to a horse standing on the slope. It was the pack-horse; but Lang fastened his fingers in the animal's mane and leaped astride its bare back. The horse started at a wild gallop for the mouth of the draw, broke through the screen of trees, and, answering Lang's heel and fist directions, ran down the valley.

At a point below where the south ridge flattened out on the east slope of the valley Lang flung himself from the horse and sent the animal scurrying back toward the draw.

Lang climbed rapidly up the face of the ridge to a vantage-point overlooking the valley and the range above the Thornton ranch. Peering intently in the dim light he searched the southern side of the ridge itself and then slowly shifted his gaze to the open spots in the range above the ranch.

In one of these open spaces he detected a black blotch of color, moving rapidly. His experienced eye satisfied him that it was a horse moving away from the ridge and down toward the valley.

He watched the next open space below and soon the object appeared from the timber and moved across the face of this meadow. By following with his intent gaze one meadow after the other, he traced the object to the slope of the valley below the ranch, saw it hesitate for a moment, and then speed down the valley trail.

Lang ran swiftly down the north side of the ridge and entered the draw. He hurried to the cabin and without a word to Condon, who was getting supper, took down his saddle and left. In the lower meadow he again found the pack-horse and quickly saddled him.

Condon, reaching the edge of the meadow just as Lang had finished saddling the horse, saw him swing into the leather and dash through the screen of trees; heard the resounding echoes of hoofbeats grow faint on the valley trail.

Condon stood indecisive for a moment; and then he too hastened to the cabin, got his saddle, blew out the single burning candle and hurried to the meadow to catch his horse.

Alice Thornton, going to the spring for water, heard thundering horses upon the valley trail. She watched while a rider, sitting straight in the saddle and moving smoothly to the motions of his horse, sped by. In silent wonder she stared down the trail.

And soon another rider flashed by.

What strange culmination was this to a day which had been the most unusual she had ever known? She became aware of a feeling of wild interest and trembling misgivings as she thought of Bransom's subtle hints concerning Langworth. And then she suddenly asked herself why she should be interested. Why? She didn't allow herself to attempt to solve her perplexity.

She hurried to the spring for the water, resolved that she would ask her father about the strange happenings of the day, and where he had been that afternoon with other men.

But when she entered the house she saw her father looking at her with a queer light in his eyes, and she suddenly decided not to speak. She shut the door hurriedly lest the echo of the galloping horses reach his ears. And instantly she asked herself why she did this. Why? A soft glow of color came into her face as she put the water-pail on the bench by the kitchen table; and then it vanished as quickly as it had come.

"Alice," said her father in a quiet, stern voice not unmixed with emotion, "you will not go to the north part of the ranch again until I give you permission."

"Why, father!"

But she found herself unable to put the question that was upon her lips. A look which

he assumed to be surprize might have been confusion. Again that question in her mind.

"You will obey me?" asked her father.

"I always obey you, father," she said.

He seemed satisfied, but the queer look, as of mingled uncertainty and strong emotion did not leave his eyes as he watched her at her tasks.

Far down the valley a clatter of hoofs on the bridge awoke the slumbering echoes in Singing River.

XXII

LANG strode into the saloon. Bransom and Frued were at the bar and three others were sitting at a small table in the rear near the lunch-counter playing cards. Kane was serving drinks.

As Lang walked up to Bransom, Condon appeared in the doorway and entered quietly.

The men at the card-table, sensing a telepathic foreboding of unusual events, turned in their chairs and regarded the little group before the bar with keen interest. Kane only seemed undisturbed.

"You overshot, Bransom."

Lang's voice snapped like a whip-lash.

"Shooting down-hill that way a man is liable to hit a hat instead of a head. You need practise, Bransom; an' you've got a better target now."

Frued slid noiselessly from behind Bransom and edged to the wall opposite the bar, leaving the two principals facing each other in the center of the room.

"Bransom, you're a dirty cur."

Stooping in a half-crouch, Bransom returned Lang's steady gaze; but no sound issued from between his twitching lips.

"Any man who would shoot another from ambush is a whelp."

Still Bransom refrained from making a reply.

"In addition to being a cur, or a whelp, or a rat—or all three in a man's clothes—you're a liar."

Bransom's eyes had narrowed until a mere flash of baleful red gleamed between the lids.

Again Lang's words came sharp and clear like the cracking of timber in cold weather—

"Bransom, I wasn't sure till now that you're a coward in the bargain."

Lightning quick as was Bransom's draw it was too slow. Lang shot almost the moment the other moved, and Bransom's weapon was sent clattering to the floor before it was even clear of the holster. Disarmed, Bransom held his right hand out before him and looked at it curiously. It was numb.

In another moment Condon had leaped in and obtained possession of the pistol on the floor. He whirled to face Frued and the men who had risen hastily from the table in the rear.

"Sit down!" he called to the men behind Lang; then he motioned Frued to the rear and stood keeping the four men covered.

Lang laid his weapon upon the bar.

"Keep your eye on that, Mr. Storekeeper; I'm playin' you for square—maybe it's a compliment, but I'll take a chance."

He turned again to Bransom.

"You lied today, Bransom, an' you know it. An' when a man lies about me I give him a chance to think it over—an' something to remember me by so maybe he'll think twice before he does it again."

With that he slapped Bransom in the face with the flat of his hand.

A cry of animal rage came from Bransom as he struck wildly. Lang countered and planted the full force of a mighty blow in Bransom's face, drawing spurts of blood. Bransom staggered back, spat, and, dodging another swing, managed to land a blow on Lang's jaw. Lang responded with a straight left that knocked Bransom back half the length of the bar.

Lunging against the bar to keep his balance, Bransom's fingers came in contact with a bottle which Kane had forgotten to remove. He hurled the dangerous missile at Lang with all his strength. Lang dropped low with a second's fraction to spare, and as the bottle smashed with a crash of splintered glass against the stove his hands gripped Bransom's throat.

The men tripped, fell, twisted on the floor; and Bransom succeeded in freeing his throat from Lang's grasp, although his face contorted in pain as he did so. He sank his teeth in Lang's shoulder, and Lang, getting a hammer-lock, bent the other's arm back and up until Bransom unlocked his jaws to scream in agony.

Lang released his hold and leaped clear.

"Get up—Bransom—an' take your beatin'—fair."

Mad with inarticulate rage, Bransom started a blow for Lang's stomach. It failed and Bransom was hurled against the bar by the impact of Lang's fist on his jaw.

Again Bransom ducked and closed to avoid the open fighting, and as the men went to the floor the second time Lang's head crashed against the heavy planking. For a moment he was stunned. Bransom, on top, raised his fist to pound Lang in the face.

"Fight clean, Bransom, or I'll shoot you sure as all ——!" rang Condon's voice.

Bransom looked up, and in that instant two things happened. Frued, seeing that Condon's attention was momentarily diverted from himself and the men at the card-table, went for his gun. But Condon caught the movement out of the corner of his eye, swung and fired. Frued, untouched, ducked to the floor, and instead of endeavoring to get his weapon into action dived for Condon's legs, overbalancing him.

As the men fell one of the three at the card-table dashed a chair into the hanging oil lamp,

sending it to the floor and plunging the room into darkness save for the light from a small lamp behind the bar.

Condon fired again futilely, and then the weapon was knocked from his hand as he struggled with Frued.

Kane picked up Lang's pistol from the bar and covered the three men in the rear.

"We'll stay out of this boys; it ain't *our* funeral," he shouted.

But the trio evidently had had no notion of participating in the fray, for they sought refuge behind the low lunch-counter.

Condon was hard put to prevent Frued from drawing the gun which his holster contained. Finally the weapon fell out on the floor just beyond the reach of either of the men.

Each struggled, holding and striking, to keep the other from getting the gun, which could barely be seen in the dim light. Bransom's weapon, which Condon had had in the first place, was nowhere to be seen.

Meanwhile the instant's respite provided by Condon's warning to Bransom to "fight fair" had given Lang an opportunity to recover his senses. Now he fought like a madman, and, gaining the upper hand, he dragged Bransom to his feet. Then he swung his right to Bransom's jaw; and when the man reeled and fell he pulled him to his feet again.

Kane had run into the storeroom for another light. He knew the danger of semi-darkness in rough-and-tumble fights like this. Also he had a keen perception of fairness, and he realized that each of the contestants would have a better chance for his life if he could see what he was doing and what the other man was attempting to do.

As he returned, bearing a large lamp, Lang saw Condon and Frued struggling on the floor, and saw Frued's hand close over the gun which had fallen from his holster. Even as Frued raised the weapon Lang, exerting every iota of his great strength, raised Bransom's nearly insensible body and threw him upon the other two.

The impact of Bransom's body knocked Frued over just as he fired. The bullet bit into the planking as Lang's fist landed on Frued's jaw and put him out of the fighting.

Condon crawled out from under the two senseless men.

"Much obliged," he panted.

Kane, coming around the end of the bar upon which he had set the lamp, surveyed the two prostrate forms.

"I've seen worse knockouts but few better," he remarked. "I guess they've had enough."

Bransom's face, ghastly in the weird light of the lamp, was streaked with blood. Lang himself was covered with blood. He motioned to Kane for his gun.

"No shooting," said Kane.

Lang grinned as he took the weapon.

"That's what they wanted instead of gunplay," he said.

Condon spied Bransom's gun on the floor beyind the stove and picked it up.

The floor was strewn with broken glass, and both Lang and Condon were cut about the face and arms. Lang drew a limp tobacco-sack from the bosom pocket of his flannel shirt. From the sack he extracted a ten-dollar bill and laid it on the bar.

"That'll help pay for the damage," he said.

"Never mind the damage," said Kane, looking at Lang with respect and admiration. "That lamp's all right except for a new chimley. I won't take that bill."

Lang pocketed his money with apparent reluctance.

Bransom and Frued were sitting up. Bransom's face, bloody and swollen, was nevertheless still distorted with evil passion, and his eyes, puffed and nearly closed, blazed with hate. But he did not offer to renew the battle.

Lang rolled a cigaret and lit it with fingers that were nearly steady as he held the match.

"It wouldn't be hard to make you confess that you lied, Bransom; not now it wouldn't," said Lang. "I'm going to wait an' let you prove it."

He flipped the burned match over his shoulder and beckoned to Condon as he started to the door. In the store he noticed that Condon still carried Bransom's gun. He took it, broke it, spilled out the cartridges, and walking back to the doorway, tossed it upon the bar.

When he had returned through the store to the front door he saw Condon sitting his horse waiting for him.

Lang paused abruptly on the threshhold, struck by the figure Condon made upon his horse. There was something about that hunched attitude in the saddle which pricked his memory, something vaguely familiar about the peculiar way Condon leaned forward over the neck of his mount as he peered into the store.

Horse and rider were silhouetted against the silvery gleam of the moon on the rippling surface of the river.

With a start that nearly caused him to cry out, Lang remembered.

It was the figure of the mounted man who had been sitting his horse before the door of the Blue Front saloon in Muddy when Lang had dashed out that day after the killing.

XXIII

CONDON rode ahead on the way back to the draw. Lang walked his horse and bowed thoughtfully in the saddle as he pondered the swift sequence of events that had taken place since his flight from the distant lowlands, and his startling discovery of Condon's identity.

The gap between the two riders widened, and when Lang, alone, reached a point below the Thornton ranch-house he looked up hungrily and wistfully at the light in the windows. Once he paused for a moment and then urged his horse rapidly up the valley trail.

When he arrived at the cabin in the draw he found the candle lit and Condon preparing the belated supper.

"Funny you've never asked me my name," said Lang as he hung up his saddle and dropped into a chair.

"I was waitin' for you to mention it," answered Condon. "I heard one of the men this afternoon call you Langworth."

"Yes," said Lang dryly; "but if you want you can call me Lang for short."

Condon's start of surprize was not lost on Lang. He rose and remarked casually—

"I don't know who or why you are, Condon, but you seem to be a friend."

He took soap and towel from the bench near the door while Condon regarded him with a fixed gaze in which a mixture of emotions conflicted.

"I see you've washed up a bit," Lang yawned; "I think I'll do the same. The broken glass from that lamp-chimney nicked me in a lot of places."

When Lang returned the men ate their supper in silence. Neither mentioned the fight.

Finally Condon spoke.

"Did you hear what that old prospector chap said this afternoon? About the mine showing up valuable?"

"Silver, wasn't it?" asked Lang.

"Yes. He said it might develop into something big."

"Oh, —— the mine," said Lang laconically.

He rose and went out into the night.

Condon had cleared away the supper dishes when Lang returned, bringing a small salt-sack which appeared to be heavily weighted in the matter of contents.

He threw the sack down in the corner by the rifle and it banged against the floor with a dull rattle.

Condon looked at him inquiringly.

"Rifle-cartridges," said Lang simply. "They fit that gun."

Condon dropped upon the edge of the bunk and stared into Lang's eyes.

The candle, burning low, sputtered and drowned its flame in its own hot grease. The light from the moon slanted through a window and across the rough floor. The coals in the hearth gleamed faintly.

Lang removed his clothes and rolled himself up in his blanket.

"Good night," he said sleepily.

Still Condon sat and stared, first at the ghostly white sheen of the sack by the rifle in the corner, then at Lang's form rolled in the blanket upon the opposite bunk.

The coals in the fire died and the chill of the cool starlit mountain night descended. An owl moaned in the whispering forest and from a bridge across the valley came the mournful howl of a wolf.

Condon listened instinctively to these sounds as he sat on his bunk. And gradually he became aware of another vibration in the sensitive air of the altitudes; a vibration which carried a familiar suggestion of regularity—*clip-clip, click-click*, against gravel and rock.

He stole silently to the door and listened. A breath of wind drowned the sound for a moment; then he heard it again. *Clip-clip, click-click*—plainer; more and more distinct. He took the rifle, untied the sack and slipped some of the cartridges in his pocket, and leaving the cabin, made his way down to the mouth of the draw, filling the magazine of the carbine as he went.

He waited behind the screen of silver firs.

It was past midnight and the soft moonlight flooded the valley.

In a short space of time a rider appeared on the trail leading down from the divide above the head of the valley. He was walking his horse, and sagged in the saddle as if weary from long hours spent upon the trail. He passed the mouth of the draw with his hat-brim pulled down low over his eyes, and Condon could catch no glimpse of his face.

Condon scaled the ridge on the south side of the draw and watched the lone rider as he made his way slowly down toward Singing River. Finally he was lost to sight.

"Somebody from the lower end of the valley probably," said Condon to himself.

He emptied the gun and returned to the cabin. Lang had long since fallen asleep. Condon replaced the cartridges in the sack and stood the rifle in its place in the corner. Then he sought his bunk.

But if Condon could have kept the rider in sight he would have seen him come to life suddenly about a mile south of the Thornton ranch.

Here he pulled up his horse, and with quick glances right and left got his directions. He turned west, crossed the river by fording, and continued up the west slope of the valley to the edge of the timber. He then swung south and followed close to the pine growth, swallowed in shadow.

He crossed gulches and ravines and came at last to a dark, deep, narrow cañon behind the cluster of cabins which marked the site of Singing River. He turned up this cañon and spurred his horse to a swift trot.

Soon he came in sight of a cabin back under a ledge of shelving rock. He reined in his mount and whistled—a peculiar signal with a sharp, rising inflection.

Receiving no answer, he whistled again and rode slowly ahead. Again he halted and sounded his signal. This time an answer came from the cabin. The man spurred his horse.

The door of the cabin opened and Bransom's voice challenged the late arrival.

"What you doing up here?"

"Never mind that," said the newcomer as he unsaddled and hobbled his horse. "We'll talk in the morning. I want some sleep."

Bransom threw open the door of the cabin and the other entered, carrying his saddle.

XXIV

NEXT morning Condon, lame and stiff from his work of the day before and the fight in the saloon, was, nevertheless up early and got breakfast. Lang went down and examined his saddle-horse. He found the limp which the animal had developed after the hard trip over the divide had disappeared.

"We'll take it easy an' cut out the work today," said Lang, who himself was feeling the effects of the battle with Bransom.

"I believe I'll take a little ride around," said Condon; "I'm curious to learn a little more about the country in here."

"Go to it," smiled Lang; "but don't stop to inspect any cattle."

He laughed; but his evident merriment was lacking in genuine mirth.

Lang was only mildly curious as to Condon's desire to familiarize himself with the locality; for he had his own reflections, chief among which was the memory of Alice Thornton as she had looked the last time he had seen her. Also, now that his horse was in shape again he questioned the wisdom of remaining long in that district where he had attracted so much attention.

He understood now that Bransom's hatred had been incurred when he had learned of Lang's meetings with the girl. Bransom was more than merely interested in Alice. And because of this Lang could not have killed the man when he attempted to draw on him the night before, even if he had so desired.

But when he thought of leaving Singing River a strange sadness came over him. He walked idly about the draw, thinking hard in an effort to solve this thing.

Condon rode down the trail to Singing River, and then without visiting the store he decided he would return to the draw by way of the western ridge. Therefore he rode west from town and began the ascent of the west slope. On his left he saw a deep, dark cañon, and trailing above it was a thin film of smoke.

He rode along the north ridge of the cañon, up the slope, and in this way he came to look down into the cañon at a point where he could see a cabin below, almost hid by a shelf of rock. His movement was suddenly arrested, not by sight of the cabin but because he had seen a figure in the doorway which he recognized even at that distance.

He turned aside from the brink and tied his horse in a clump of spruce. Then he crawled cautiously down behind some cedar bushes which served as a screen until he was almost directly over the cabin.

In a short time Bransom, Frued, and another man came out. Bransom's face was cut and swollen and one eye was shut. Frued also displayed marks of the conflict upon his visage.

"Frued will take you out an' give you the lay of the land, Frank," said Bransom.

The man called Frank surveyed Bransom in the bright morning sunlight with a grin.

"Gee, he handed you a good one, didn't he?"

"Never mind that," snarled Bransom. "You say you've got a plan to get the goods on him an' so have I. If either of 'em pans out I'll forget this soon enough."

Condon was quickly interested. Did the newcomer know Lang Rush? Was he there to——

"You better edge down the timber on this side of the valley and cross at the southern end," Bransom was saying to Frued. "I'll meet you about sundown."

"An' don't be late," said the man Frank. "I've got to be on my way."

Frued brought two horses which he and Frank saddled. As they mounted Frank looked at Bransom again with a grin.

"Some tough customer, eh? Well, I know how to trim his horns."

Bransom cursed.

"It's —— funny you can't let me in on it," he exclaimed finally.

The other merely laughed, and Condon caught a gleam of satisfaction in the man's eyes.

"Better keep under cover," called Bransom as Frued and his companion rode away down the cañon.

"Leave that to yours truly," Frank shouted back, still laughing.

Bransom stood for a moment looking after the men, and then with a string of curses he turned back into the cabin.

Condon crawled back up the steep slope to the brink of the cañon and ran for his horse. When he emerged from the spruces he cut down through some light timber to the edge of the west slope. He continued along the edge of the timber for two miles north and then crossed the valley and the river and made at a swift gallop for the mouth of the draw.

He did not unsaddle his horse but tied him in the timber on the north side of the draw, away from the meadow where the other horses were feeding.

Lang was in the cabin getting the noonday meal.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he asked as Condon entered.

"Looks like this valley is all shut in by herself," replied Condon.

"She's sure rimmed in," agreed Lang.

"Is there a trail out by the south end, suppose?" asked Condon casually.

"Why, I reckon there is," said Lang. "Not down the river, though. A log couldn't float down the cañon that river busts through."

"Trail over the divide from there too, eh?"

Lang paused in the act of putting a plate of beans on the table.

"Why—was you figurin' on——"

"Just wondering how many exits there was," said Condon hastily.

"Sometimes that's a good piece of information to have in mind," remarked Lang thoughtfully as he sat down to the table.

After the manner of men in the open they finished the meal in silence. But once or twice Lang looked up to see Condon staring at him curiously; and once Condon seemed on the point of saying something but evidently changed his mind.

Condon cleared the table and washed the few dishes while Lang smoked. Then for the best part of the afternoon the two reclined on their bunks and dozed. Finally Lang rose and left the cabin. Late in the afternoon, with Lang still absent, Condon opened the sack in the corner and filled his pockets with cartridges. Then he took the rifle and walked into the timber on the north side of the draw.

XXV

THE sun had set when Lang returned. He seemed surprized when he found the cabin vacant. He lit a candle and instinctively looked in the corner where the rifle had stood. His brows arched when he saw that the carbine was gone and that fully half of the cartridge content of the sack had been removed.

He looked quickly at the peg in the wall where Condon's saddle usually hung. The saddle was missing.

Lang snuffed out the candle flame with his fingers and hurriedly made his way down the draw to where the horses were feeding in a little meadow near the mouth. Two horses—his own horses—were there; but Condon's horse was gone.

"Might have known it," said Lang to himself. "Wasn't really any use in looking. He never unsaddled his horse after he came back this noon."

Although he was troubled by rising suspicions Lang went about the business of getting supper. He was not ready to acknowledge that he knew the reason for Condon's absence. But in any event he did not intend to take unnecessary chances. Again he thought of leaving the valley, and again he felt that strange pang at the thought.

He took his blanket and the tarp and went into the timber high on the south ridge, where he spent the night.

When he returned to the cabin in the morning Condon was still missing. Lang's frown deepened as he prepared his breakfast; but still he held back the thought that lurked in his mind.

After breakfast he saddled his horse and slowly climbed the trail to the ridge below the main divide. He followed this south, scrutinizing the trails that led toward the eastern slope of the main range.

In the afternoon John Thornton rode across the south end of the valley to the Miller cabin.

"Joe, you seen anything of that bunch of Herefords I had down this way?" he called as Miller came out from behind the house.

"Saw 'em day before yesterday, John; they was on the east side of the valley 'bout two miles below your place."

"I know. They been in there for two weeks or so; but I can't find head or hide of 'em today. Thought maybe they'd crossed."

"Don't think so, John. I been running my few head on the west side an' been over there every day for a week an' didn't see any of your cattle over there."

"Wal now, that's strange, Joe. I can't seem to find them cattle; an' the east range is so cluttered up with tracks I can't tell which way they went—I've hunted 'em all day."

"They ought to be on the east slope somewheres between here and your place, John; the feed's good over there an' they wouldn't stray. There's been nothin' to bother 'em."

"Nothin' we know of, Joe; but they ain't there just the same. I've looked into every park 'tween here an' home."

Miller's brow wrinkled thoughtfully.

"That sure *is* queer, mighty queer, John; suppose you go over the ground again. I'll go with you an' take the lower parts while you follow well up on the ridges. Maybe they're in the timber. They wouldn't go up over the divide unless they was driven, John."

"I know that, Joe; an' if you want to len' me a hand I guess I can find a way to do you a good turn some day."

"Never mind that, John; we've got to stick together in here. We're runnin' our stock too high up in the hills not to help each other out when we can."

Miller went back to his barn and corrals and soon returned riding a stocky cow-pony.

The two men crossed the river and went up on the east slope of the valley. At the edge of the casual timber growth they separated. Thornton took the upper trails and Miller kept to the lower portions of the range.

Thus they made their way up the valley, searching for Thornton's missing cattle. At

sundown they met on a ridge above and north of Thornton's ranch-house.

"Nary a sight of 'em," said Thornton, frankly puzzled.

"Mighty queer, John; what I mean—mighty queer. Now where could them cattle have gone?"

Thornton shook his head grimly without answering.

As the two men sat their horses looking out over the long reaches of timbered slopes and the narrow valley, they spied a rider coming north along the ridge just above them, close under the towering shadow of the main divide.

Instantly alert, they watched; and as the rider guided his horse down a crooked bit of trail and edged toward the upper end of the draw behind them, John Thornton recognized him.

"By ——!" he exclaimed as his face darkened into a frown.

"Who was that, John?" asked Miller. "Know him?"

"That's the feller I was tellin' you about day before yesterday—Langworth, he calls himself."

"Man you warned off your range?" asked Miller quickly.

"The same man," said Thornton.

"Well, he's just off of it—just above it—today."

Thornton stared at his horse's neck thoughtfully.

"Joe," he said finally, "tomorrow we'll get Bransom an' his man and the Williams boys, an' we'll comb every inch of the range in here for them cattle. It's —— sure I'm a-goin' to find out where they be or where they went."

"All right, John; I'll be on hand first thing in the morning. We'll start up here and go through her right. Them cattle ought to be here somewheres. If they ain't—there's something wrong."

"So I'm thinking," said Thornton as the two put spurs to their horses and galloped down the slope.

Lang was grimly silent and deliberate as he unsaddled his horse and turned him into the meadow midway the length of the draw. He had found no trace of Condon in the course of his day's explorations, and he knew now that he hadn't expected to find any trace of him. More and more the thought which he was struggling to repress kept reoccuring in his mind, demanding recognition. He hid his saddle conveniently near the meadow where the horses were instead of taking it up to the cabin.

Then he prepared some supper, but found he did not have his usual appetite.

He lit a candle, sat down upon the edge of his bunk and stared moodily at the floor.

Recovering from his abstraction momentarily, he found his gaze fixed upon a bit of folded paper under the bunk which had been Condon's.

XXVI

LANG regarded the paper curiously. It was not such a scrap as would be torn from the label of a can; nor was it a piece of newspaper. It was folded and showed stains as if it had been carried in a pocket—say the outside breast pocket of a man's shirt, along with his tobacco.

Lang picked it up, spread it out on the table, and then stepped back with a startled exclamation.

He leaned low and read the printed characters over and over again. He straightened and compressed his lips into a fine white line, and his eyes gleamed dangerously.

The thing he had read was a printed handbill —a hasty piece of work, rich in typographical errors—containing in bold type the statement that one thousand dollars would be paid by the sheriff of Teton County for the apprehension of Lang Rush, charged with murder. And it set forth an accurate description of the man sought.

Then the thought which Lang had been holding back for many hours no longer would be denied.

Condon's object in coming into Singing River Valley, his craftiness, his duplicity—all were revealed in the instant that Lang gave his reasoning powers full rein. Condon was after the reward!

Swift review of every act of Condon's merely served to strengthen this conviction in Lang's mind.

Condon had witnessed the shooting. He had followed Lang because he had sensed that a reward would be offered. It was Condon's trail that Lem Robbins had crossed that night after Lang had fled from Muddy—Condon who had trailed him to Sixty-Mile spring, across the gumbo flats and into the hills. He had doubtless been twenty-four—perhaps forty-eight—hours behind him, and thus had picked up the handbill on the way.

And while Condon had more than likely chanced upon him in his hiding-place, the fact remained that he had eventually discovered him —blundered into him where a more experienced man-hunter might have been led astray.

That he had had no gun, no money, doubtless made him more desperately eager to earn the reward. No wonder he had not asked Lang his name; it was more remarkable that he had not spoken it in an unguarded moment.

Condon's actions in the saloon the night of the fight with Bransom now were readily explained. He knew Lang was suspicious of him —perhaps he surmised that Lang had ostensibly hired him to mine when he knew he had been put where Lang could get a line on him and watch him—and so took part in the fight to allay Lang's suspicions. Then he had aided Lang in the fight because he did not wish to see him

killed for the selfish reason that in such event there would be no reward to collect! And Lang had put the whole thing up to him by trusting him with the cartridges for the rifle.

Did Condon's conscience hurt him? Did he propose to hide behind the authorities in the matter of giving him up to the law?

Condon was gone. Lang faced the issue with bitter realization of what the man's absence meant. He had gone to notify the sheriff. It was as plain as the candle-light that flickered in the breath of the night wind.

One thousand dollars! Drayton *was* a big man. Lem Robbins had been right. Drayton's friends would go to any pains to avenge him. And Hemp had successfully linked him with the robbery of the bank at Bradley. The time had come once more to hit the long trail, a fugitive.

Then he remembered something else. Perhaps Condon had a double purpose. The mine! Nixon had said it was valuable and had explained why. Now Condon proposed to turn Lang over to the authorities, get the reward and obtain the mine for himself alone in the bargain.

Lang was not in a position to claim or keep the property which he had accidentally secured. It was his, and yet——

No—only the long trail remained.

He began making a small pack of supplies, rolling them up in his slicker. He could not be bothered with a pack-horse now. He would have to travel fast—fast.

But he paused in his work as he felt again that subtle pain at the thought of leaving the valley. A vision of sweet, girlish beauty was framed in the weaving shadows on the cabin's walls. What would Alice Thornton think—or would she think at all?

Lang believed she would. And he faced the amazing but indubitable fact that he could not leave that valley without at least seeing her once again.

John Thornton had said he would shoot him on sight if he went near the girl again; but Lang's eyes smiled whimsically as he thought of the threat. Yet he could not be seen near her, not because of the threat or for any fear for his own safety, but because of the girl herself.

Lang would have cut off his right hand before he would have cast any reflection upon her or caused her any annoyance.

He left the cabin and walked out into the cool air of the night. The moon was shining on the great white peaks and the sky was flooded with stars. Below were the soft, dim reaches of the valley where Singing River traced its ribbon of silver against the somber slopes and the darker shadows of the timber.

The night wind filled his nostrils with the scent of pine and fir, and the voices of the brooding forest called to him. Something in the wild, weird beauty of the tumbled land of jagged crags, towering peaks, and misty ranges strengthened his mood. For hours he walked up and down the upper end of the valley with his face to the stars.

And there was need of haste! Long before this Condon might have reached a telephone; even now the authorities might be racing in an automobile for the hills and their prey. Every minute spent thus might prove a link in a chain which would bind and fetter his liberty—choke out his life.

He returned to the cabin and finished arranging his pack. He took this down to the edge of the meadow where the horses were and tied it behind his saddle, which was cached there.

This done he resumed his lonely patrol on the valley trail before the mouth of the draw.

When the first pale shafts of dawn appeared in the high skies above the divide he hurried to the cabin. Lang had arrived at a daring decision. He started a fire, put a handful of coffee in the coffee-pot, filled it near full with water, and set it on the stove. He put a frying-pan on to heat and made flapjack batter. He cut many slices of bacon and put them in another frying-pan. He set dishes and a small can of sirup on the table.

While the coffee was coming to a boil he examined his gun, cleaned it, oiled it, spun the cylinder, fanned the hammer, loaded it and put it back in its sheath. He filled every loop of his cartridge-belt and stuffed the deep pockets of his pants with surplus loads.

After breakfast he waited until the sun was up, then saddled his horse and led him up the steep slope to the top of the ridge on the south side of the draw. Here he halted to stare curiously at a number of men who were riding into the timber on either slope of the valley.

"Early for a roundup," he mused as he watched them vanish.

He led his horse up the crest of the ridge, mounted and started slowly through the timber in the direction of the north end of John Thornton's ranch.

XXVII

WHEN Lang reached the meadow where he had last seen Alice Thornton he halted abruptly in the shelter of the trees. He had caught sight of a horseman crossing the meadow. When this rider had passed on into the timber on the farther side Lang waited a bit and then skirted the open space and made his way through the pine growth to the long, grassy slope above the ranch-house.

The man ahead of him had passed the house at a canter and soon entered the timber again in the south. Lang dismounted, threw the rein over his horse's head and waited. He saw other riders in the valley and far up on the western slope, but he paid no attention to them. He watched the house.

Lang had come to tell the girl about himself. He knew a posse might even now be closing in upon him, but he was going to have the satisfaction of telling Alice Thornton everything before the end. Something in the quiet majesty of the great hills had gotten into his blood; the clean skies and sunshine, the pure, sparkling water in the river, the clear air—all inspired him to ease his heart of its load; to face the consequences like a man.

Finally he saw the girl upon the path leading from the house to the spring. He stepped out upon the slope and called softly. She looked up, saw him and hesitated. He beckoned to her. She continued on to the spring, filled a pail with water and went back into the house.

Lang drew again within the screen of trees. Would she come? And then he blushed at the thought of his presumption in inviting her to meet him. What had he been thinking of?

He walked to his horse, took the rein and turned for a last look at the peaceful scene below. He dropped the rein and his heart gave a great bound. She was coming up the slope!

"Miss Alice," began Lang as he removed his hat, "I called you up here because I didn't want any one to see us together—not that I care for myself, but because of you."

"You are very considerate, Mr. Langworth."

"My name isn't Langworth, Miss Alice, although it is partly that. My name is Lang Rush."

"Langrush?" she inquired in a cool voice, turning questioning eyes to his.

"Two words—first and last name; Lang Rush Miss Alice, I come from the prairie country. I have never been this far up in the mountains except this once. I—I killed two men down there."

She took a step backward and her hands flew to her breast. He didn't see her movement, for he was not looking at her; but he sensed it.

"I killed one of the men because he tried to draw on me. I thought the other was tryin' the same stunt. I was the faster man with his gun. I had been drinking, too; but not enough but what I knew what I was doing. I'm not offering excuses; I'm tellin' you because—I want you to know. I am also charged with bank robbing."

She was watching him intently with a strange, perplexed smile upon her face, which was white.

"After the killing when I realized I had made a mistake concerning the second man I beat it out of town and hit for my ranch. The drought, I guess, wiped me out of its ownership; but I took two horses and some supplies and escaped to these hills. I was followed by a man who arrived in here a day or two after I got here and who went to work for me. I opened up that old prospect-hole in the draw as a blind—to excuse my being here until my horse could get over his lameness."

He paused again, and in the interval of silence she stooped and picked a few flowers to cover her agitation at this strange confession.

"The man who followed me has disappeared and I believe he has gone to notify the sheriff. One thousand dollars reward is offered for my capture. The posse may be here at any moment."

"How long has the man who followed you been gone?" she asked in a low voice.

"Since day before yesterday."

"You suspected all this yesterday—that the officers would be coming for you?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you go then? You could have gotten away."

"I wasn't sure of what he had done until—last night."

From his breast pocket he took the handbill and held it out to her.

"I found that under his bunk last night."

"But you could have gotten a good start last night."

Lang looked at her with sudden interest. Was she interested in seeing him get away?

"Why didn't you go last night?" she asked, looking at him frankly.

"Something—held—me back," he faltered. "I guess it was you."

"*Me?*"

"I rather reckon so," said Lang dreamily.

"But how could I hold you back?"

"I—I wanted to see you again before I went, and—although I didn't know it at the time—I wanted to tell you—everything."

"You risked your liberty, even your life to—to wait and tell me what you have today?"

"I reckon that's about it."

"But why?" exclaimed the girl, coming close to him and looking into his eyes.

Lang put his hands upon her shoulders.

"I reckon you know why," he said softly.

She paled; then the color stole into her cheeks as Lang dropped his hands. She stepped back.

"You can't be so very bad or you couldn't tell me these things so easily and look at me so frankly. Are you sorry?"

"No."

"But you didn't want to kill those men, did you?"

"It happened as those things happen on the range. My father taught me to watch a man's gun-hand, and made me practise until I got pretty speedy with my own."

"You still have time to get away," she said almost in a whisper; "and your secret is safe with me."

"I'm not asking you to keep it a secret," said Lang.

"But you trust me—you must have expected me not to tell."

"That thought never entered my mind. I couldn't have gone away without telling you; an' I couldn't have told any other girl. I guess that's it."

He was looking at the lofty ridges where the tips of the pines and sharp pinnacles of rock showed against the skies. And then he heard her speaking.

"Have you ever seen the prickly pear in bloom?"

"Every Spring I've seen the prairies covered with 'em—miles and miles of 'em," answered Lang with a wistful, yearning note in his voice as he stared out across the valley.

"My mother often told me about them. She loved them. She said they bloomed in three colors where she was born—white, pink and amber. And she used to think of the colors of the prickly-pear blossoms as faith, hope and charity. Faith was the white blossom, hope was the pink, and charity was the amber. Maybe it was the colors and what they stood for in her mind that she thought of—more than the blooms. Perhaps the same colors in other flowers would have meant the same to her."

Lang thrilled as he felt her hand touch his—press something into his palm.

"Good-by, Lang Rush," she whispered.

Lang turned to see her hurrying down to the ranch-house. He opened the fingers of the hand she had touched and looked. He started as if he would follow her, but didn't.

What was it she had said about the colors of the prickly-pear blossoms, and that the colors might mean the same in other flowers? White for faith——

Slowly he raised to his lips the fragrant bloom of a white, wild mountain rose.

Faith!

For a long time he looked at the valley bathed in sunshine and the green waves of timber rising tier on tier to the white peaks. So busy was he with his thoughts arising from a vague exultation in his heart that he did not see a rider regarding him from the crest of the ridge behind him; and when he did look about him again the rider was gone—threading his way silently through the timber toward the south end of the Thornton ranch.

Lang wrapped the flower in a handkerchief and placed it within the bosom of his shirt. Satisfaction and misgiving and a strange trend of thought worried him. He suddenly became aware of the extraordinary fact that he was considering giving himself up to the posse that must now be on the way. Give himself up? He had virtually arrived at that decision.

He leaped upon his horse and dashed recklessly back through the pine growth toward the draw. He spurred his mount through the screen of trees and up to the cabin. He built a cigaret and sat down at the table. Always there was the image of the girl in his thoughts, and a sweet, intangible influence which she now had over him.

It might have been an hour that he sat thus—perhaps a little more, or less. But suddenly the silence of the hills was rudely shattered. From the direction of the river below the mouth of the draw came six shots in quick succession, twice repeated, as if they were a signal.

XXVIII

LANG leaped to his feet instantly alert. He rode to the mouth of the draw, dismounted and peered through the fringe of trees. Three men were approaching on horses, and one was considerably in the lead. Lang could not recognize this man; but one of the others he made out to be Bransom.

Lang stepped out from the fringe of silver firs and the man in the lead saw him. He shouted something which Lang could not hear. Then he drew his gun, which was an action Lang could readily understand. His own weapon flashed into his hand and blazed just as the other's bullet spattered the dust at his feet.

Lang saw the man collapse in his saddle as his horse shied and made off down the river. Bransom and the other man wheeled their horses and beat away from the draw, firing as they went.

Lang sprang back within the shelter of the trees. His eyes were darting fire in resentment of the strange attack. It was Bransom's work, he felt sure; trying to get even for the beating which he had received at Lang's hands and which he had well deserved.

Leaping back into his saddle, he forgot his worries and the unique problem with which he had been wrestling. The shots from the trio had brought back his instinct of the open range—the protection of his life and liberty. The problem could wait. Meanwhile he would leave the draw.

He rode out from the shelter of the trees to be greeted by a volley of whistling bullets, uncomfortably close. He turned back his horse, dismounted in the draw, and climbed to the lookout on the south ridge.

He gasped with astonishment and dismay; then his gaze became cold and hard, and the fire in his eyes was blue-steel.

A party of horsemen was speeding toward him from the direction of the Thornton cabin. Lang counted them—five! Even at that distance he could make out the form of John Thornton.

Instantly his thoughts—his hopes, resolves, good intentions—were cast into chaos. Bitterly with grim irony he convinced himself that Alice Thornton had told her father.

But whatever had precipitated this attack it was now unmistakably apparent that things had come to a showdown.

Lang raced down the steep slope for his horse. He knew he would not have time to make a dash out of the draw for the trail up the divide even if he could succeed in passing the gunmen in front; but at the head of the draw he would have one advantage. He would be trapped, but the attacking party could approach from but one direction—up the draw. The sheer cliffs and sharp, jagged crags above could not be scaled without enormous risk, and the sides of the draw were veritable walls of rock at the upper end.

He whirled his horse about and dashed up the draw. He tied the animal in a clump of young pine-trees on the north side under a ledge of rock just above the cabin. Then he ran to the prospect-hole. Before it was a barrier of earth and rock, part of which had been thrown out by the original locator, part by Condon when he started to clean out the hole, and much of which had been piled up and scattered by the blast of a few days before.

Meanwhile Bransom had joined the party led by Thornton.

"He's shot Miller!" he exclaimed.

He overlooked explaining that Miller, who had wished to ask Lang if he knew anything about the missing cattle, had made the mistake of drawing his gun.

"He shot Miller first thing," continued Bransom almost gleefully; "an' he's in there alone. I was watching him. He went down an' saw your girl—called her up an' tried to talk to her until she ran away from him back to the house. He sent the other fellow out with the cattle, must be, an' came back to see the girl an' get some things. Probably wanted her to run away with him; he's that kind, I tell you——"

"Hold on," roared Thornton. "That's enough of that. Is Miller hard hit?"

"Shot in the leg. He's down by the river fixin' his wound."

"Who's up there?" asked Thornton, pointing up the valley above the mouth of the draw.

"Milt Burns, who was helping us look for the cattle over on the west slope."

"Where's Frued?" asked Thornton.

"I sent him down below town on the west slope," said Bransom uneasily. "He'll be up here pretty quick. There's enough of us with you and these boys to get that rat in there."

Thornton looked at the armed men about him and patted the rope which hung from his saddle-horn.

"All right; we'll go get him," he said; and, spurring his horse, he led the party into the draw.

Lang heard the horses and watched from behind the rocks in front of the prospect-hole. Directly before him was an open space which extended across the draw, which was very narrow here at the apex, from the wall on either side.

To the right was the clump of trees which concealed his horse; below this was the little grove which screened the cabin and the spring; farther down, the pines stretched across the draw except for a small gap where the trail led through the timber to the lower meadows. To reach him the men in the attacking party would have to cross the open space which Lang proposed to make a dangerous piece of ground.

Lang had forgotten everything except his fierce, burning, instinctive resolve to sell his life as dearly as possible.

He had been betrayed by Condon when he thought he had won the other by his friendship and confidence; and the girl?

At this moment John Thornton rode boldly up the trail and halted his horse in the little gap between the trees.

Lang could hear others at the cabin and near the spring. They had searched the rest of the draw and knew he was entrenched in the prospect-hole.

"Lang Rush, come out here!" rang Thornton's voice.

Something in Lang's heart burst into flame.

Thornton knew his name! The girl had told him all. His capture meant money for her father and for the men with him. And his life was at stake.

"John Thornton, I'll kill the first man that comes closer than you are."

Then Lang's gun spoke and the hat was whipped from Thornton's head by a bullet.

The still air vibrated to the roar of guns and lead spattered against the rocks which shielded Lang. Thornton drove his horse back into the timber as Lang shot at a spot where he had glimpsed the smoke from a gun. He reloaded hurriedly.

A bullet splintered against the rocks beside him and a piece of lead tore through his sleeve. He crouched lower and waited. It hardly seemed likely that the men would try to rush him because they knew he would get some of them as they crossed the open space.

The bullets continued to spatter against the rocks. The direction from which came the reports convinced Lang that those against him were shooting from the protection of the cabin on one side and of an outcropping of rock on the other side. They evidently hoped that one of the bullets might find a crack between the rocks or splinter in such a fashion as to reach him.

He heard some of the bullets strike into the rocks and clay behind him. And then his blood chilled as he remembered.

The dynamite!

He had cached it in the rear of the prospect-hole to have it away from the cabin and where it would do the least damage if it should be set off accidentally.

It was there behind him. A chance bullet

might set it off any second. Even as he was thinking of the certain result if this should happen a fresh volley sent the lead plunking into the soft clay behind him.

XXIX

LANG fired three shots toward the rocks at the left side, reloaded his gun and peered cautiously through a crevice. He was careful not to empty his gun entirely or the men—counting his shots and thus being aware that he was reloading—might rush him and catch him at a fatal disadvantage.

The firing slackened a bit as if the attackers realized the futility of it and were conferring. Lang crept back to where the dynamite lay in a sack against the rock wall. With his hands he began to scrape out a place in the clay. Another shower of bullets sent him scurrying back to the protection in front.

During a second lull he tried once more to dig a hole sufficiently deep to bury the dynamite, but again he was driven to the security of the rock and gravel barrier by a volley of bullets.

Suddenly the shooting was hushed and in the stillness Lang heard sounds from the direction of the river. These increased in distinctness until he made out the hurrying, thudding echoes of hoofbeats. There were several horses in the approaching party, and Lang surmised it was the sheriff's posse.

The horses now were pounding up the draw, and the Lang heard Bransom's voice raised in a warning shout—

"Careful Frued—keep back there!"

Lang caught sight of a horse through the screen of trees below. Instantly his gun blazed. A string of curses came to his ears and he laughed. Then the silence fell again like a pall. He could hear the subdued murmur of voices from somewhere below.

He slipped back and worked like mad, excavating with his hands. He hurriedly put the sack of dynamite into the shallow hole and heaped dirt and stones upon it. A bullet smashed against a rock close to his head—another and another.

Lang leaped back to the boulders in front. Just as he did so he caught sight of a flash of drab color in the short open space between the trees which screened the cabin and the clump where his horse was hid. A man was jumping across the space.

Lang's gun spurted fire and the man stumbled forward upon his face and lay still. Silence followed this first visible tragedy of the fight in the draw.

"Wish they'd all try that stunt, one at a time," said Lang to himself as he reloaded. But he hardly had given vent to this thought aloud when a gun cracked somewhere in front of him and a hot, burning sensation manifested itself on his left shoulder.

He crouched low and put his hand within his shirt; it came away bloody.

"Nicked!" he exclaimed. "Where is that fellow shooting from?"

Another bullet tore through his hat and Lang scrambled to a huge protecting boulder at the left. As he did so there was another flash of drab color in the opening near the right wall; but before Lang could get his weapon into action in that direction a man had vaulted across the open space and gained the shelter of the little clump of trees where his horse was tethered.

Lang now was compelled to lay flat to take advantage of the cover of the rocks to the right. He had not counted on one of his enemies reaching that clump of trees. The man there had an advantage almost equal to Lang's.

And Lang had made another disheartening discovery. The bullet which had creased him in the shoulder and the one which had hit his hat—much too close for anything approaching comfort—had come from near the top of a tall spruce that grew close to the wall of the draw near the rocks which concealed some of the attacking party below on the right.

They were taking to the trees! From one of these it might be possible to pot-shot him.

His predicament now had become one of the gravest danger.

Lang did not wish to risk firing into the trees at his right because he might hit his horse. Lurking in his mind was the glimmer of a wild hope—the hope that something might develop in his favor to enable him to make a dash for it.

He was sorry he had not attempted to make the trail to the divide. He would have had a better chance in a running fight than trapped as he was, hemmed in by towering cliffs behind, confronted by enemies in front and with a cache of dynamite at his back.

Through a niche between the boulders he was able to get a glimpse of the tall spruce. Soon he saw a puff of smoke as the man concealed in the branches fired. Lang shot three times at the spot where the smoke had showed—once directly below it, and once to either side.

His answer was another puff of smoke—and another. A bullet whizzed through the niche as he reloaded. The sniper was protected by the trunk of the tree, of course.

Then from the trees where his horse was hidden came bullets which sang over his head. He groaned at the futility of his position. If he could only fight in the open!

There was a rattle above him—a clatter and succession of dull, echoing reports—and then a stone plunked into the gravel beside him. With a sickening sinking of his heart he turned partly upon his back and peered up just in

time to catch sight of a man's arm twisting about a ragged spire of rock towering above him. This spire was the continuation of a fragment of the rock wall which rose from a huge crack or fault.

Lang noticed for the first time that this crack extended into the wall on the left so that it formed a narrow space protected from the front and open only toward himself and the north side. A man was climbing down, or lowering himself into this crack in some manner.

Every hope Lang had held to went glimmering as he realized the menacing purport of this latest move. He would be shot down in cold blood from above. Without so much as the narrowest margin of chance imaginable he would be potted without being given the most remote opportunity to defend himself. Rage blazed from his eyes as a shower of bullets came from the tall spruce.

Very carefully Lang took aim at the smoke-patch and waited to give the other time to reload. When he thought the man in the tree would be leaning out for another round of shots he fired five times in a narrow cross-line at the spot where the smoke had appeared a moment before.

He heard a crashing in the branches all the way to the bottom of the tree behind the granite outcropping. He had hit. Instantly he rolled over on his back, refilling his gun. From about the spire of rock above he saw a man's head appear. He leveled his gun; but with his thumb drawing back the hammer he paused with a pang of painful surprize.

The man above him was Condon!

But Condon was not looking down at him. He seemed to be propping himself on an invisible ledge. He was in view only of Lang and possibly of the man in the trees by Lang's horse.

And now Condon was raising a rifle to his shoulder—Lang's rifle, which he had taken from the cabin. With a dull ache at his heart, in which anger also slumbered, Lang drew a full bead on the head of the man above.

The rifle leveled—not at Lang but on a line over Lang's head and the protecting rocks. It struck upward with a sharp report as it breathed red lightning. Lang, too dazed and astonished to shoot, saw Condon's head jerk back behind the rock spire.

Before the echo of the rifle's report had died away Lang heard a chortling scream that was smothered in a gurgle and the sound of a body falling upon the rocks near at hand. For a moment he was bewildered.

Then the blood bounded into his throat, choking him with a wild, awe-inspiring, fascinating hope as the truth seared his excited brain.

Condon had shot the man in the trees at Lang's right!

XXX

AFTER a spell of silence the bullets again whistled over Lang's head; but they struck higher upon the rocks, showing that the attackers did not purpose to take any more chances shooting from the tall spruce—or perhaps another sniper was climbing into place among the branches.

Lang paid no attention now to the fusillade, which was doing no damage. He had even forgotten the dynamite in the new and amazing turn that events had taken. Was Condon sure enough an ally?

He looked up into the crack and a thrilling sight met his eyes. With the carbine slung by a strap to his back, Condon was lowering himself down a rope. He was concealed from the men in the timber down the draw and could be seen only by Lang.

Lang watched him, fascinated, as he came down hand over hand until he reached the end of the rope. Then he dropped to the ground within the crack. He crouched back in the narrow crevice and looked at Lang for the first time as he grinned and unslung the rifle from his shoulder. The firing had ceased momentarily, and Condon sprang across the short intervening space in two jumps and landed in the prospect-hole.

He gripped Lang's hand as he said in a hoarse whisper:

"That was Frued I got over there trying to creep up on you. What's the row about?"

"Bransom's work," replied Lang, "or else—I told Alice Thornton about that trouble down at Muddy, and——"

Condon nodded in surprize.

"How'd you know I knew about it?"

"I recognized the way you sat your horse in front of the store the night after the fight. I thought probably you'd gone for the sheriff, but I guess I was wrong."

"You're dead right you're wrong, Rush. I——"

The crash of six-shooters below them drowned his words. In Lang's heart there was a raging tumult of joy because Condon had come up to scratch. He had proved himself a friend; lived up to the trust Lang had put in him after——"

Lang gripped his gun in a fierce grasp as he heard voices engaged in a wrangle behind the timber below them. The voices became louder as the firing died away. They could hear Bransom swearing frightfully.

"Let's make a dash for the timber by the cabin," whispered Lang.

For answer Condon rose stealthily. They leaped out of the prospect-hole and raced for the cabin. Evidently the men in the attacking party had not anticipated such a bold move, for Lang and Condon reached the shelter of the trees without a shot being fired at them.

Creeping to the edge of the first meadow, they saw several men in a group in the center. Thornton and Bransom evidently were engaged in an argument.

"Wait here for me a minute," whispered Lang.

He stole back above the cabin to the body of the first man who had attempted to cross the open space to the trees where Lang's horse was hid. He secured the dead man's gun and quickly rejoined Condon.

"We'll step out an' cover 'em, an' if they don't behave proper right quick start shootin'. Ready?"

Condon leveled the rifle as they stepped out from the fringe of timber.

"Reach for the sky, all of you!" rang Lang's voice as he too covered the men.

Bransom was standing behind Thornton as they whirled to face the direction from whence the voice had come. Instead of following the example of Thornton and the others, who raised their hands and dropped their weapons when they recognized their disadvantage, Bransom swung his gun up behind Thornton to fire. But Thornton saw the move and knocked the gun up as Bransom sent a bullet crashing on its way into the tree-tops. Then Lang's gun spoke and Bransom's right hand fell limply to his side.

"You fool!" Thornton had cried.

"That's his style. It don't look to me like you're very particular who you pick to help your play, whatever it is, Thornton," said Lang coolly. "What were you after me for?"

"There's a bunch of my cattle missing, Rush, for one thing," said Thornton.

"Where did you hear Rush was my name?"

Thornton indicated Bransom with a nod.

"He told you?" exclaimed Lang joyfully.

"Told me your name was Lang Rush, that you was a cattle-thief an' was tryin' to steal my little girl. What have you got to say to that? 'Course, you don't have to talk now you've got us cornered."

"You're right there," said Condon. "We don't have to talk but Bransom is going to talk or he's going to stop some lead from this rifle. How about it, Bransom?"

"What do you want?" asked Bransom, white-faced as he stared into the rifle-barrel.

"Who took the cattle?"

"Frued."

"Sure—blame it on a dead man. But who helped Frued and that mysterious stranger who came in here a few days ago round up the cattle and drive 'em over the divide night before last? Speak up Bransom, or, by ——, I'll shoot."

"I—I thought we was—rounding up my own cattle."

"There's the man responsible for the cattle-thieving," said Condon to Thornton.

Then, turning to Lang, he said quickly:

"I saw Bransom and Frued and this other feller who Bransom called Frank down at Bransom's cabin. They was framing up some kind of a deal to get even with you for that night.

"I lit out to watch 'em, thinking to surprize you with what I'd learn, and I found 'em driving away a bunch of cattle. I followed 'em and found out that the newcomer was a member of a gang of horse-thieves and all-around crooks and that Bransom and Frued had been in with the bunch until 'bout a year ago when they got cold feet because the homesteaders was gettin' so thick and lit out for the hills with a bunch of stolen cattle.

"This gang is camped down below the divide on the other side and Frued brought back three of them with him to help Bransom get you. I followed 'em back. They was in such a hurry one of 'em dropped his rope, which I picked up—lucky I did too, or I never could have got down into the draw."

"You say there's a gang down there on t'other side with my cattle?" asked Thornton, dropping his hands in surprize.

"Just so," said Condon evenly. "The man Frank came up here to try and get Bransom and Frued to go back to the outfit. Maybe Lang here knows of 'em—the leader's a tall, sandy sort with a drooping mustache and a scar on his chin where the ends come together; I got one look at him and knew I'd seem him before in the back room of a saloon in Bradley."

"Hemp!" Lang exclaimed.

"Don't know what his name is but he was pointed out to me as a horse-thief—' Hey! Where you goin', Thornton?"

Thornton walked swiftly out of sight below the meadow. In a moment he returned, carrying a rope. He looked at Bransom savagely as he advanced.

"We got a sure cure for rustlers up here," he said meaningly. "I begin to see why you was so anxious to offer them three strangers to help in this business. Bad business it has turned out for them—and now it's going to prove a bad business for you."

"Wait a minute," Condon said crisply. "This fellow said Lang here was botherin' that girl of yourn, whereas I saw Lang chase him away from her one day when he was getting too fresh and after he'd tried to pull his gun. How about it, Bransom?"

"We'll not mention the girl in this," said Lang. "She isn't to be spoken of in the same breath with talk of this—rat."

Bransom's face had lost its pallor and turned purple with suppressed rage at Condon's speech. He started to say something when his eyes bulged and he stared past the little group before him.

"The girl can speak for herself," said Alice

Thornton, riding into the meadow. "Is this why you sent me to the Miller cabin on such short notice, father?"

"Go back," ordered Thornton.

"No, I guess I'll stay; and you might as well know now that I was not being bothered—except by Bransom himself. Are you satisfied that this man Lang—this man here—isn't a cattle-thief, father?"

For answer John Thornton started toward Bransom with the rope.

"Don't," said Lang softly. "I think we've been taking the law in our own hands long enough. You can let the proper authorities attend to this fellow's case; he's doubtless wanted in the lowlands for more than cattle-stealing."

Lang had stepped before Thornton, turning his back upon Bransom, who had started to run. Now Bransom stopped and whirled about with a snarl as his left hand came out from within his shirt, bearing the glint of hard metal. With a cry of warning Condon leaped to Lang's back just as Bransom's weapon streamed fire. In another half-second Lang's gun blazed at Condon's side. Bransom crumpled to the earth in a grotesque posture, doubled back with his knees caught under him, and was still.

Lang ran toward him, stopped, sheathed his smoking gun and turned.

Condon was swaying as a willow branch sways in the wind. His weapon dropped from the hand that had not been favored with the swift skill demanded by the emergency. He looked at Lang and smiled—an odd, surprized sort of smile it was—and then he sank to the sweet grass that carpeted the meadow.

With a cry of pain and rage and horror and infinite compassion Lang dropped on his knees beside him.

"Did he hit you Con, old pardner?"

"I guess—he—did," said Condon feebly, still smiling.

The girl had dismounted and now knelt by the stricken man and looked across at Lang.

"He saved your life," she said in a hushed voice.

"This maybe squares us a little for—your saving me from Frued's gun that—night down—at Kane's," said Condon.

"That was squared when you shot from the cliff," said Lang quickly with tears in his eyes as he opened Condon's shirt.

A sob broke from his lips as he saw the ugly wound.

"Water," he called; but Thornton already had gone for it.

From down the valley trail came the sharp, resounding clatter of galloping hoofs.

Condon tried to raise himself. He gripped Lang's arm.

"The sheriff!" he exclaimed in a loud whisper. "That man Frank got to a forest telephone before I—knew—what he was up to. He knew—he knew—he telephoned! The reward, Lang!"

He tried to shake Lang's arm.

"The sheriff—the sheriff!"

"I know, old pardner; I've been waiting for him."

Condon lay back faint with exertion. Thornton came with the water and they bathed the wound from which the blood kept spurting.

As the sheriff and four others rode up the draw and into the little meadow with guns drawn Lang rose and confronted them.

"Put up your gun, sheriff," he said quietly; "I reckon I'll surrender."

XXXI

"WHAT'S been goin' on here?" demanded the sheriff as he dismounted.

"It 'pears like a powerful lot that wasn't exactly called for has been goin' on," said John Thornton; "an' this boy's hit bad."

If Thornton was taken aback at the appearance of the authorities he did not show it. While Lang and Alice tried in vain to stanch the flow of blood in Condon's side Thornton explained in detail to the sheriff what had taken place.

Lang looked up now and instantly stepped toward one of the men.

"This is one of Hemp's men, sheriff," he said.

"That's the fellow Frank," called Condon. "He telephoned."

Lang's gun had covered the man. He had recognized him as one of the men he had seen with Hemp in Bradley.

"Take his hardware away from him sheriff, till you've had time to question him."

But the man's face already had given him away. A deputy relieved him of his weapon and took hold of his arm to guard against an attempt to run.

"Lean down here, sheriff," whispered Condon. "I saw that shootin' down at Muddy—was sittin' my horse lookin' through the door. The short fellow drew on Lang here first and Lang shot in self-defense. Then the other man—went for his hip an' it looked like he was pullin' a gun too. It wasn't Lang's fault—I—I saw it."

He paused to get his breath while Lang lifted his head into his lap.

"Don't try to talk, Condon; I'm goin' down to face the medicine——"

"I followed Lang out of town," interrupted Condon, speaking to the sheriff. "Put the posse on the wrong track because I suspected there'd be a reward and I—I thought—I wanted it. I followed him to his ranch that night and afterward into the hills and—stumbled on to him—in here."

"Where did you meet Hemp that night?" the sheriff asked Lang.

"He went to his ranch, I tell you," said Condon in a voice strengthened by excitement. "I followed him—all the way."

"You wasn't in on that bank deal with Hemp?" asked the sheriff.

"No," said Lang. "I turned Hemp down flat when he made his proposition to join him—knocked him down. He called out my name that night out of spite and to implicate me.

"This man Frank was with Hemp that night—maybe he'll talk if he thinks it will make things easier for him. And Hemp and his outfit are down on the other side of the divide—where? Condon, can you tell us where?"

Speaking slowly, Condon gave the directions.

"I'll talk," said the man Frank. "You seem to have the goods on us—and Hemp's never made up as a friend to me. Rush wasn't there that night."

The sheriff walked over to Bransom's body and looked into the man's face.

"I know him," he said immediately.

Lang and the girl were bending over Condon.

"I got Bransom; plugged him for good," Lang was saying.

"Lang, that thousand dollars looked good to me—did you know a thousand was offered for you?" asked Condon faintly.

Lang nodded and moistened the dying man's forehead with the cool water from the mountain spring.

"But that day I saw you stand—in the prospect-hole and refuse—to put up your hands—I—I knew—or thought I knew—I didn't want that money. And when you told me after—the fight at Kane's that I—I seemed a friend—and put back the rifle-cartridges—I was sure of it. I—I learned something up here in—the good, old hills, Lang—maybe you did too——"

"I did," said Lang. "And I knew who you were, or why you had come up here, that night when I put the rifle-shells back. I meant what I said."

Condon coughed and a red froth stained his lips; but his eyes glowed with a happy light as Lang grasped his hands.

"I hope when my time comes that God'll put me on your range, old pardner," said Lang brokenly.

The red froth on Condon's lips showed a deeper crimson.

"Tell 'em to stand back," he whispered, "so I can see the hills."

And as Lang raised Condon's head in his arms a ray of golden sunshine broke through the green of the pines. The dying man smiled faintly and a wondrous glory came to rest upon his face as if death had brought some greater reward than life had held.

Lang pillowed the head upon the fragrant grass of the meadow and put his handkerchief over the still, white face. For a moment he held in his hand the flower which had been wrapped in the handkerchief—the flower the girl had given him—the white flower of faith. He looked up at her; saw the tears in her eyes; then he crossed Condon's hands over the still breast and closed them about the white, wild mountain rose.

Lang stood up, straight and pale, and drew his gun slowly from its sheath.

"I'm ready whenever you are," he said to the sheriff as he tendered his weapon.

"I knew he was going to give himself up," said the girl to the officer. "He waited yesterday and last night when he could have gotten away to tell me so this morning—not in words but in looks."

"I don't need your gun," scowled the sheriff, tugging at his mustache. "Mine suits me all right."

He paused, thinking.

"Look here, Rush; did you think Drayton was drawin' on you sure enough?"

"It looked pretty much that way. I saw him go for his hip—waited until I saw the glint of metal—an' I didn't know until it rattled on the floor that what he was pullin' out was a—a chewing-tobacco case."

"I told him many a time that that habit of his when excited would get him bored some day," ruminated the sheriff. "He owned up I was right before he got out of bed."

"Out of bed!" exclaimed Lang. "Didn't he die?"

"He was mighty close to it for a spell, but he's pulled through. It was a bad wound. But now—when he hears all this—well now, I'll be hanged, Rush, if it don't look to me as if this here case has passed out of my hands!"

Lang remained silent—stunned by the good news that he hadn't killed Drayton.

"Sheriff, we ain't never been much on law up here," drawled John Thornton; "but now that it's come suppose we go down an' get this cattle-rustling outfit first an' then——"

"If Drayton wants me to push this thing I can come back after you," interrupted the sheriff, speaking to Lang. "I reckon you'll be here?"

"I'll be here," promised Lang.

"All right," said the sheriff as he mounted. Then with a twinkle in his eyes—

"I'll put you in charge of that young lady."

Lang and Alice were silent as the others rode away.

"Have you decided what it was that made you stay — wait?" asked the girl after a time.

"Yes," answered Lang without hesitation. "It wasn't you so much as it was what you represent—the clean, clear fairness of the hills and the skies. It's an influence I'd always like to have—with me."

XXXII

AUTUMN had come to the high hills and Nature had lavished the whole content of her magic paint-pots in tinting the valleys and meadows with flaming crimsons and ambers and gold. Singing River flaunted its silver ribbon in a riot of color. The dying needles of the tamaracks traced yellow bands about the ridges, thus enhancing the brilliant green of pine and spruce and fir. Wild life had quickened; the air was crisp with the first invigorating chill of Fall.

Lang and Alice were mounting two horses before the Thornton ranch-house.

"There, you've got the two best critters for travelin' that's in my string," John Thornton was saying. "You ought to make Deerford an' the preacher by sundown."

The girl blushed as her father kissed her and placed her hand in Lang's.

"I'd like to be a-goin', but I got to keep an eye on things up here an' you don't need me. Take care of her, lad, an' God bless you both."

When the two had ridden away Thornton turned to Nixon and the Millers, who had assembled to witness the departure.

"They'll be living in the lowlands this Winter an' I think I'll be a-goin down to visit 'em. Something's wrong with me—maybe I'm gettin' old—but I've got a hankering to see a train."

"Yes, an' you'll maybe see 'em up here some day," said Nixon. "You know Drayton wouldn't have put up money for a half-interest in that mine Rush has when he came up here to talk things over if he didn't believe it was goin' to be a big payer. You know I alers said——"

"Nixon, you shet up," thundered John Thornton. "If I hadn't taken them cattle on down an' sold 'em after we got that Hemp outfit I'd never listen to no mine talk. I'm a stockman. An' unless I'm very much mistaken that boy is the same breed. Mark my words, now that he's got that ranch back, and the drought is broken and the country looking right again, I'll bet we'll be down there stock-raising or farmin' within another year!"

ON THE crest of the main divide Lang and Alice pulled up their horses. Below them the long ridges sloped down like a series of steps to the golden haze of the great flat land of the prickly pear. The golden banners of the rising sun were heralding the advent of dawn in the east. A breeze brought the fresh earthy smell of wind-swept grasses.

"The prairie wind," said Lang softly.

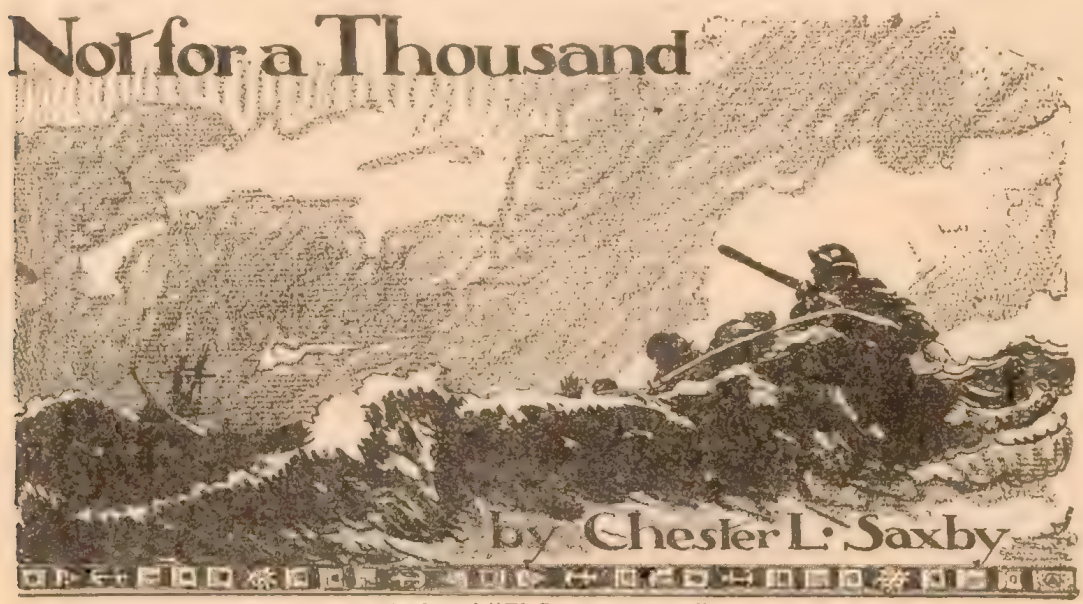
She placed her hand upon his shoulder as he leaned from the saddle to put his arm about her.

He included the mountains behind them and the long, dim reaches of prairie before them in a sweeping gesture.

"God's own country," he breathed.

"And ours," she whispered.

Together they rode into the dawn.



Author of "El Capitan Arrnie."

AT A rear table in Jake's place on the San Francisco water-front Arnie Sondheim sat behind a bottle, a glass and a stout flow of language. He discussed the sailing-question in the negative, and what passed for strength of diction in the argument would in most public meeting-places not have been allowed to pass at all.

In Jake's place many of the polite laws went unsustained—and a few others besides. It was a stinking place, unless one's olfactory sense had grown sufficiently stoical not to notice. Arnie

Sondheim's education in that regard had gone a full step further: the stench, while distasteful, he accepted as a distinct improvement on that of bilge-water as inhaled from a forecastle berth. This he was engaged in setting forth without nicety of discrimination as to words; while the shipping agent balanced himself on his heels and watched Arnie's blue eyes turn to steel.

"It's a —— of a life—and seventeen years finding it out!" Arnie concluded.

He swallowed the amber stuff in the glass, made a face and shivered. He disliked whisky; nobody would believe it—but then he did not care whether they believed it or not. The concoction in sufficient quantity gave him peace, peace from the endless void of lonesomeness that life had turned out to be.

As a boy staring out at the fairy mystery of the deep he would never have believed that he should have to turn his back upon it in very despair of satisfying the hunger that had sent him out upon it. For that matter, he was no nearer comprehending that hunger. It seemed strange that other sea-faring men were not bothered with this yearning that he could not describe. He knew only that the whisky brought temporary satisfaction, just as the few days of being second mate on the *Snowbird* had brought it—and being with Lelona could bring it. But Lelona would not have him so long as he shipped before the mast, and never again would he command his watch; that much had been settled on the last voyage. Wherefore, he consigned shipping agents and captain to the devil.

The agent heard him out placidly, blinking a little and studying with some interest the paradoxical sunny countenance turned toward him, the innocent blue eyes, the rugged worldliness of Arnie's set mouth. He thought he knew Arnie. All agents thought they knew Arnie. Jake had reason to know him, for he spent his money at Jake's. By that same token, the tawdry women with the drooping eyelids who infested the place thought they knew him also. And yet the agent was beginning to wonder if this was really the Arnie Sondheim he knew, sitting here condemning the sea.

"Twenty dollars a month slapping round in a leaky fo'c's'l bunk, skinning your hide on the stays, breaking your back on the halyards, and Cap'n Miant——"

A bare-shouldered woman, lifelessly gay, passed close behind him and rumpled his light, curly head of hair.

"Little son-of-a-sea-cook!" he broke off, grinning.

"I wouldn't blame Captain Miant, son," observed the agent, taking heart. "You were steering the ship, and you ripped out her yards. You had it coming."

"It's all right," Arnie allowed. "Only he won't do it again. He smashed me, when I've seen him take grog himself to keep going. It was my stomach; I hadn't been eating. I know their navigation laws backwards, can shoot the sun——"

"Well, my man, you'll not get a mate's berth on this coast." The agent's impatience at length asserted itself. "If that's what you're looking for—you'll look!"

"No, I won't. I've chewed my last bully bill. I'm through."

The agent on the point of departing thrust his face very near Arnie's nose. In a hard whisper he vociferated:

"A fine bucko like you, with a head better than most masters on the Pacific! You'd amount to something. You'd command your own vessel. I never saw the like of you for real smartness—nor for rum-swigging, either!" he added and strode out of the door.

Arnie scowled after him. He scowled because the agent told the truth, and only the truth did he bother about. Arnie understood—quite. He possessed the qualifications for a ship's cabin; he knew the sea and its moods; he knew ships from stem to gudgeon; he knew men—the men who went down to the sea in ships.

And what else did he know? Nothing! Aboard ship he was at home; ashore he was lost. But suppose he gave up drink, the whisky he detested but that remained his one friend. What ship's master would give him a chance? And Lelona had no intention of waiting forever. If she could but understand!

He grasped the bottle and poured out some of the liquor. At sight of it in the glass something within him revolted. His infernal memory was at it again: impossible to forget a single fact of his experience! The seventeen years rising clear as fresh water to show him what he was and what he might have been!

Might have been if—what? He did not know. But he had dreams, vague things; and a masthand should never have dreams. One of those dreams was Lelona, the glorious Spanish girl in San Carlos who had grown to be a woman. He heard her voice, low and tuneful:

"—you come again—be *capitán* nex' tam' —*Capitán* Arrrnie—maybe——"

Captain! *He* captain! The only way he could ever command a ship would be to buy one—at twenty dollars a month! —— the sea! —— the bottle!

One sweep of his hand, and a rivulet of tawny liquor ran across the bare table and over on to the floor. Instinctively he thrust out his glass to catch the precious flow, the bitter, stinging flow. Then with a curse he flung the glass after the dripping spirits and was out of his chair and making for the street.

He had nowhere to go. His feet bore him toward the water-front; they knew no other course ashore. From the wharf to Jake's; from

Jake's to the wharf. And ever this uneven making over the latter cruise, this luffing and sheering, this veering and hauling! But though his sense of balance suffered, his mind remained keen.

"No signing—none of that," he kept mumbling. "No more dog's life."

Then he stood in the midst of a great commotion. On all sides warehouses and shipping-offices and a hopeless welter of men and animals and coughing engines and cranes and the squawk and rattle of chains bearing huge loads. He found himself staring out across the broad bay through a tracery of spars and yard-arms and a network of shrouds. Tall masts rose proudly like slender reeds, were crossed by thick arms of furled canvas.

A bark wore silently for the dim outline of the Golden Gate, scornful of the smoke-spewing tug puffing past, squatting low and evilly in the water. The late morning sun overhead caught the promonotories afar out and gave them splendor. A gentle breeze bore inland the stalwart smack of brine. He gazed at it all.

"Well," a voice spoke behind him, "what's it to be, Arnie?"

Arnie twisted about, halted an "Aye, aye, sir!" on the tip of his tongue, and regarded Captain Miant dourly. Captain Miant reflected the dourness.

"You cost me a pretty piece of money, my lad," the skipper barked. His eyes narrowed to slits. "And you broke your word, which is worse, but—" he cut off Arnie's flashed interruption—"but that's past, and we carry no wine this cruise. I'll give you twenty, and we clear in three hours. What's it to be?"

Arnie measured the other a moment, then laughed without merriment.

"I reckon," he said coolly, "you've made more out of me than you've lost. You figure to do it again. I figure you won't. You can sign me on as mate, or——"

Now the captain laughed; it was an astonished laugh.

"Where are your papers? Maybe you'd like to be master——"

"Or I don't come at all. I've got a notion to eat good food and have real folks to talk to. I'm no man's dog. It's a fine day ashore."

"And no money in your pocket, nor no way to make any. We clear for down-coast; but if that doesn't interest you, Valparaiso, Callao, San Carlos——"

He swung on his heel and stalked off down the wharf, leaving Arnie looking after him.

Arnie echoed, "San Carlos—" in a queer, choky voice and turned to survey the sea again. "San Carlos—Lelona——"

Captain Miant was going to San Carlos! He wrestled with himself. He felt Lelona's cool lips in a vivid, all-including moment. He thought of all the women in Jake's place; conjured up every joy he had ever known—and flung them all aside. If he could make her understand—assure himself that she would wait——

Characteristically he made his decision:

"Another year of hell! A year of hell for a kiss!"

And down the squeaking boards he went charging, pitching and banging into whatever came in his path, down the wharf and up the street, hard on the heels of Captain Miant, unmindful of men or animals, betrayed by a word.

AND that very night he stood gripping a backstay and rolling and swaying for quite another reason, which was that the bark *Snowbird*, Captain Miant, took the cross seas badly, overloaded as she was and built along clipper lines for swift sailing. But he scarcely thought of this just then.

The shore-lights dropped lower and lower and smudged out in the brackish gray of sea and sky. A queer little smile played foolishly about his lips. To forget what he had done, he set to watching the second mate jumble his orders and start the crew to swearing.

It was not Arnie's habit to criticize; his superiors he more often accepted than damned. But this second officer's obvious inefficiency aroused his seaman's disgust.

He told himself that he was a fool for undertaking this voyage and so quite in his proper place in the forecastle; but a fool was better than a dullard and a marine—in which category he immediately put the second mate. He should have sold his sea-chest days ago; whereas the second mate never should have purchased one. He had no business finding himself here at sea; while the second mate had business here but could not accomplish it.

In this mood Arnie sauntered to the galley to ask the cook for a snack. Supper he had renounced, for the after-effect of the drinking had not left him then, and the insensate wallowing of the brig offered no help. The cook permitted him to enter the little deck-house. It was steaming hot and running with scalding water overturned by the rolling motion. The odor of frying grease mingled with the other odors of the ship.

And yet the indefatigable Yankee who had supplanted the plethoric oily-faced African so long known to the *Snowbird* preserved a decent amount of optimism. Arnie watched him in some surprise, listened to his nasal singing of a whaler's chantey—and wondered. He felt awed. Here was one in worse circumstances than his own—for Arnie, nursing resentment against shipping before the mast, nevertheless not for one minute compared the cook's job with his.

How could this wizened slice of a man who rarely saw the sunlight directly and even less

seldom breathed the fresh air, this slave in a sweltering box who strove all day without a let-up, without a change, without companionship, until he tumbled into his bunk too weary to care to eat, only to be jerked out before it was light again—how could he find the heart to sing? Yet sing he did and with right good spirit, not once resting from his arduous labors:

" 'Unlucky,' they shouts, 'n' they throws 'im out—
O Lord, will Thy wonders cease?
This Jonah he squirm right outen that sperm
With a fistful o' ambergris."

Arnie backed against the door and waited, forced into a grin.

"Don't be mindin' my singin', Jack," the bit of a fellow threw at him. "Chirks me up in proper shape, a mite o' singin', when I be leg-weary. You a mind to eat a bite? Sho!"

In spite of his gossipy tendency he flew about the galley, his hands and feet ever active, ever industrious. His thin legs, seen beneath his uprolled trousers, made Arnie desire to laugh. His red face gave him a fantastic appearance. He chucked a pannikin into Arnie's grasp.

"Right smart weather, what say?—Avast there!"

He dived for a can of milk, slipped on his heel and went down; up he bobbed instantly, cracking his head on a low shelf.

"Tol'able wind fetchin', I declare. Makes the work uncommon hard. 'Low I never met up with you. Mostly whalin' these twenty-two year— How's that?"

"I asked if you never signed on as masthand," Arnie repeated.

"Gorry, no! Pesky hard work, Jack. I aim to keep your bellies full—twenty-two year, on an' off—I find it real agreeable; sea life's my style—big bucko crew we was last voyage spermin'—roarin' huskies every man of us; that's how come I got the singin'-habit."

After escaping pots and pans he scurried after the mop to wipe up the boards—all in vain, for with each lurch of the bark down came a pot again from the rack, over spilled the kettle on to the stove and the floor.

"It's hot," observed Arnie presently. "Regular —— in here."

"What say? Well, now, ain't folks queer? Stirrin' up downright chilly, I sense it. In fer a blow, Jack; bad night. Allus keep fair cozy in the galley, howsomever. Don't envy you lads, not a mite. Listen to 'er down below."

"That'll be the steel pipes," Arnie nodded. "The seas sound in 'em. Is it flour that's loaded on the pipes? What's the old man thinking of?"

"Cornmeal," the cook told him.

He stubbed his toe and brought up dangerously near the hot stove.

"I snum! Sets a mite by the head, don't you say?"

"So she stays up. I guess we can stand it."

Arnie made to pass out, his chunk of bully beef in his hand.

"Overloaded; no beam for the weight she carries. Seas up to the bulwarks; all roll and no lift. G'night."

As he closed the door and stepped into the rising wind, the beginning of song wafted after him:

"Luff 'er an' ease 'er as strong men do——"

He edged forward and took his station on the forecastle head where he became wrapped in his thoughts, utterly contradictory thoughts, now of Jake's place gay with lights and clamor, now of Lelona in San Carlos and of what she would say to him when he stood before her at the hotel kitchen door. Would she laugh at him and shrug her pretty shoulders and turn her back when she found he was not captain, not even a second mate?

The mate swung out of the gloom, peered close into his face.

"Is it you, Arnie?" and Arnie made a wry face in the darkness.

They would be wanting something as usual, something his memory could serve them, his abnormal memory that never skipped a fact, his quick, infallible sense for position, for so much that a common seaman was not expected to know.

"Aye, sir. Back before the mast, Mr. Lairton—like a sea fool."

"Sorry, lad. Time you learned different." A moment's silence between them; then: "What's the time o' night, lad? The bell don't reach the cabin."

"Six bells in five minutes, I'd say, sir."

Arnie spoke offhand and quite without conscious thought. He was scarcely ever aware of the ship's bell. He had always been able to tell time by instinct, just as he told his bearings in a fog.

"Then I'll be shifting the course—three points off; keep her so," Mr. Lairton bawled to the helmsman.

Back came the reply—

"Three points it is, sir."

A slight creaking and wearing aloft.

"Lay out on the fores'l and shake out a reef," he sang to the watch.

Like rats they scampered out of hiding-places, Arnie before them all. Clinging to the yard-arm, he heard the ship's bell speak six times——

BELOW, indiscernible from this wild perch in the midst of a chill-fed night, the mate smiled at the sound of the bell. Arnie was right. The next instant he tossed aside the thought as serving no use. Arnie was Arnie. Best to put no new notions into that

astonishing head. Arnie had had his fling; a fine mess he had made of it! Give him cable and he'd only hang himself—and the bark's crew along with him. And nothing but a common whisky-craving behind it all.

The vessel continued to make out poorly; not even the foresail kept her head. The wheel kicked whenever the sickening roll fetched up the stern. She took the seas like a derelict. Captain Miant had blundered, or had let the owners talk him out of his shrewd seaman's judgment. Three times in an hour the mate ordered the sails trimmed; but no shifting of the canvas eased the burdened helm. Like a gorged and sodden thing the vessel wallowed in the trough—insensate——

At eight bells the larboard watch tumbled up, grumbling over their trick below, mouthing—as they made much ado finding their sea legs—their satisfaction in being on deck. Arnie and the starboard watch laughed at them and scrambled down the ladder into the protection of the forecastle; they knew that the wind was coming off fresher and with a chill nip to it. They forgot to laugh when they lay in their bunks and essayed to sleep, for the stench of bilge-water constantly shaken up made sleep a difficult matter; moreover the seas beat against the bows with sledge-hammer blows.

Arnie early relinquished the futile endeavor and swung his feet out on to the floor. Somehow he could not dissipate thought; he found his pipe, setting the example for others. Smoke began to curl down from the low beams, rendering the swinging oil lamp the smokier until the figures of men became as unnatural shapes in a fantastic dream.

For a long time not a word was passed. Ears seemed attuned to catch the sounds from without and above. Forms slouched forward; eyes stared into vacancy; an occasional mild execration witnessed to the general discomfort amid the pitching and careening. Outside seas pounded with weird regularity. Overhead thumped hurried, shuffling feet. The winches protested raucously; sheets screeched home; the ship wore somewhat, and a new sound came, the diapason, drawn out lengthily into a hard hiss of tumbling seas boarding her. It would be a bad night.

Arnie rested his head against the upright with his arm breaking the jar and jolt and fell to visualizing Jake's place in Frisco— Seven kinds of a fool—bolting out on a wild-goose chase, scudding off at a word—from bad to worse—always from bad to worse—a ship's forecastle in February and an overloaded hold—steel pipes and cornmeal—Just when he had vowed never to sign on another vessel——

Bang! Swish!

For twenty dollars he endured this turmoil, this rotten smell, this sleepless jouncing, and named it life, just because at the end of months of it waited a kiss. Aye, but he couldn't be sure of that. Women were curious things: today yes, tomorrow no. It had been today; it might be tomorrow now.

"You be *capitán* nex' tam'——"

Those were her very words, along with a careless flirt of her superb head that gave the lie to her inviting smile. He saw it all plainly; he understood. There were men in San Carlos—well, they received more than twenty dollars a month. Lelona had pride; she did not throw herself away.

For a few short days he had been mate, had wondered at the satisfaction the office gave him. If he were but mate, it might be different. A wry expression twisted his mouth. As out of the question to be mate as to be captain—his chance had come—and gone. The world laughed at him, shook its head and laughed in his face. He accepted the justice of that verdict and laughed in return. When he could not find a laugh, he'd find the next best thing: slipping off a yard-arm in a squally wind or getting in the way of a truck in Frisco. Arnie had pride too; enough to make him a stoic.

"Hark to thet squealin' rooster now," spat a restless one near by.

They all listened. The second mate's high-pitched voice whined above the clatter of the sea and the rigging. A lubber—a square-head——

"He'll swamp us yit," another voice croaked. "You er me 'ud do better, Coke—er Arnie there." An uncouth burbling sound went up on all hands.

"Go to ——!" growled Arnie wearily.

He was sick of that joke; time they forgot it. Nevertheless, he grinned.

"I wouldn't take the job for a thousand."

"Now ain't thet too bad! Cap'n Miant was thinkin' o' askin' yuh."

Again the laugh, while overhead—*Boom!—Sss-hhr-r-r*——

"What 'd I tell yuh? Tail onto 'er! Tail on you!" screamed that thin voice.

The groan of straining girders rose all about. A dozing fellow, caught on the peak of a long roll, pitched suddenly clear of his bunk and across the floor, wound into a helpless mass by his blanket. Arnie took advantage of the reprieve and turned his face to the wall.

AT GREAT effort the *Snowbird* labored on, making the best and the worst of it, keeping her head up when she could, fighting off the tendency to thrust her nose deep into the billows and bury her troubles. By daylight the gusts had steadied into a gale; they ran before it in a pursuing cloud of angry spume, both watches on deck and the captain pacing, black of countenance, in the lee of the wheel-house.

By noon they had to surrender the course;

under bare jib and spanker it was down the wind at all costs. Not even the weight of the cargo could deter the bark now. She took the crests at a lurid, wracking leap, trembled and swayed in sickening indecision, then shot dizzily down a mountainside like something solid.

And the snow began to fall, in sparse flakes at first, in vagrant eddies, in stinging whirls that bit the skin. The next night found them shut off from the world by a curtain miles thick, a great white shroud.

Captain Miant stopped Arnie at the galley door and hauled him into the lee.

"We should be off Concepcion or thereabout." His tone exhibited depressing uncertainty. Hesitating, he came to it—

"What do you call it?"

"Almighty ——, sir, I call it. And a quick voyage for us all."

"Come, my man. Watch your tongue. I've asked you a question. The fate——"

And then Arnie laughed. "The fate of the vessel," the old man was about to say. It was all so very clear. And it mattered so little. The gale was driving them south-south-west and a point south; it could be but a matter of time. Seventeen years following the seas; and the end of it all just where he had started!

"What's the fate of the vessel to me, sir? I signed on for masthand, not navigator." This answer regaled him hugely. "I'm not good enough to help run this ship, sir, but I don't mind saying," he shouted above the tumult, "we stand a —— sight closer to All Saints' Bay than Concepcion. That's my guess. And that's right, too, for we'll all be saints soon, and the old brig—she'll make a tune out of 'er pipes in Davy Jones' locker."

He made a study-picture whipping to the plunge of the bows, his head bare to the icy spray and the fury-driven snow. He had blood, had Arnie Sondheim, that all the bitter whisky in the world could not thin. The tempest lifted him out of forlorn introspection, cleared his mind, made him careless of consequences and fit for anything. Son of Thor—or Woden! The old man might strike him down where he stood for his impudence; he would not raise a hand. He laughed. And then he fell silent, for the captain had turned himself about and was stumbling away, his shoulders bent as if with premature age or infinite distress. And Arnie had seen his eyes just for a moment. They were the eyes of a harrowed, bereaved man; a man to whom the ship was everything: pride, hope, joy, wife and sweetheart.

Arnie watched him out of sight in the snow-bank, a little startled at the gaunt transformation. Sobered, he continued toward the galley where others were before him obtaining the evening meal for the crew. Even in such times men must eat.

The pasty-faced cook dashed hither and thither, singing out cheerfully, swinging his undersized frame upon every jutting shelf with a series of surprized grunts that not at all broke his optimism.

"Two minutes, lads; I'll have it ready now!"

Bang went a pot of potatoes off the stove and on to the floor. The men grinned openly. "There goes the third mess I've peeled, lads. Never saw such a catouse. I want to know."

The man's shirt was wringing-wet with perspiration; a bead glistened on the end of his nose.

"No sense in gettin' webbed up, what say? The Lord sends the wind, and the devil brews the fog, is what." Away he skated, a ludicrous shadow.

A cry drifted down—

"Hands 'hoy!—top hamp——"

The rest was lost. Oaths broke loose. The men shuffled to the door.

"At it, lads! I'll hev yer tuh eat——"

The storm flung them off their feet. They crawled forward. Shadows were taking the shrouds at a slow, fighting pace. Axes were going aloft to clear broken and tangled hamper. In the dimness one clutching fellow missed his footing; his chalk face showed in a crack in the snow-pall. His numb hands managed to hang on. Up! Up! Up! Cruel work and a haunting glimpse below when a momentary rent made the deck visible. Why did the fool take the lee shrouds with the wind forcing him out—out——

Suddenly the ratlines thrummed the terrible tidings. A cry—frightful, anguished—all eyes straining upward—a sailor leaping to carry assistance—too late! A ghostly something slithered down, bounced over and over, limbs outstretched rigidly and clawing—clawing. Just a gleam of a ghastly visage shooting by before the raging combers swallowed it. An awe-stricken tenseness!

"Man overboard!" a buffeted cry rang hollowly.

"——!" from the captain. "Twenty-one years of sailing——"

He searched the convulsed deep. The mate announced in his ear:

"Ed Garteck it was! What's to be done, sir?"

A useless query; they both knew. The *Snowbird* swept on, a snowbird in very truth, absorbed by the merciless white pestilence. By the morning she leaked badly. In the galley whence he had been ordered the bit of a cook crawled on his knees, preparing a meal that no one could reach, that no one cared to eat. Arnie with a cut across his cheek clotted and unnoticed, fought into the galley to hear that aimless piping:

"—— he squirm right out o' that sperm
With a fistful o' ambergris——"

He braced himself and swigged some hot coffee that burned his throat.

"You're all right!" he roared at the astonishing Yankee.

Outside, working up the life-line, he crept through crushing seas to the pumps wheezing out their lungs at the madman's game of drinking the ocean dry. Captain Miant halted him.

"Where is she now, Arnie?" His eyes were bloodshot, his face encrusted.

"Saint Eugenie, sir!"

He clapped his lips over the impulsive, "and —— if I care!" The old man's face was too tragic for that, after all. He wondered in a fog of thoughts how he knew where they were; but he was sure he was right.

"If I could make Saint Lucas—If I could round the point——"

What hunger! Here was something more than life going into the losing. Arnie who had shipped on a year's cruise for a kiss—and lost it—Arnie thrust the salt out of his eyes, spat it out of his mouth. These two, after years of sailing, at last came near knowing each other. The captain was losing his ship; Arnie was losing all that his groping mind understood—Lelona.

And as certainly as Lelona was lost, the *Snowbird* was lost. Lower and lower the struggling ship thrust her bows. The crew mumbled and cursed and broke from the pumps. They counted this a crazy work; they knew how far the water had advanced in the forward part of the hold. To hang on longer meant suicide. Seams had started. The bowsprit was snapped clean off; the bark no longer answered her helm.

At length the captain acknowledged the grim truth. The order was passed—

"All hands stand by to abandon ship!"

The *Snowbird* had sailed her last voyage; the winds and the waves claimed her. The crew edged toward the long-boat.

Two boats lay smashed in the davits. Only the long-boat and a small gig remained seaworthy. Six must ride in the gig, and that no more than a cockle-shell. The lugubrious word went round—

"A short ride for six!"

The mate without a word struggled forward to where the gig was lashed. He bent over the lashings; his features betrayed no whit of flinching. A hand fell on his shoulder. He looked into the face of Arnie Sondheim.

"I'll take 'er over, Mr. Lairton," Arnie rasped in his ear. "All the same with me," and it was plain that he meant it. "I'm a lone man. I can handle 'er."

"Drawing's aft," rapped out the mate. "Take your chance there."

"Flip you, sir!" Arnie showed a piece of money. "Heads or tails?" The mate gloomed at him. "You call, sir. I've handled a skiff all my life."

"Heads!" jerked the mate. Arnie showed tails and took over the rope-end. Four others, cursing and glowering, cheated the seas sweeping the deck and came to his assistance. One more to come. Slipping and sliding stumbled up a queer bit of humanity so laden down with well-wrapped parcels that only two watery eyes showed. The mittened fingers held out a bedraggled square of paper scrawled with the word "gig." In the next minute the little boat swung clear.

"Cal'late the weather's a-cuterin'," the cook mumbled and sprawled into it, his parcels flying about him. He pounced upon them, every one. "Aboard, men!

> "Says Jonah, 'Sing hey, 'tis my lucky day,
> An' I'll lay me a course tuh Frisco . . .'"

Arnie, diving for an oar to keep the boat off, heard him. He laughed; it was funny.

"Let fall," he bawled.

The sheets slowly paid out. The gig caught a comber; the tackle was jerked loose. Sidewise they swept into a lurid green gulley, rose and looked astern. Captain Miant was clinging to the rail and staring back. Utter dejection showed in his posture. Then the long-boat took the water——

Chaos! A white hissing overhead, a boiling green below, about and above. A sense of panic giving way to despair, to a dank numbness; the cold settling in the marrow; bailing—bailing—bailing—to no avail!

In the sternsheets Arnie steered with an oar for a rudder, steered instinctively, his mind elsewhere.

The cook, having never learned idleness, bailed and jabbered like ten. A chattering grew in his mouth and became so regular that the men swore at him when their nerves could stand it no longer. He smiled weakly in complete understanding.

"Frosts a man right smart, don't it? Turns a man's stomick——"

He shivered constantly as if he were a mound of gelatin. Withal he was sick, sick. By and-by he could lean over the gunwale and relieve himself.

"Sho! The parcels won't stand the wet, lads. If yuh'd set on 'um kindly—no fear o' crushin'."

In three hours his voice had wasted to a thin thread. From sitting erect he sagged to a worn slouch, thence to a hal-fsprawl, whence he roused like a jumping-jack to call for the bucket.

The snow stopped falling as it grew dark. The wind showed signs of veering. The green cascades were endless. A funk had seized the men; depression came on the heels of a dreary dusk; ennui conspired to reduce the chances of these abandoned few. Only Arnie maintained his place and kept them atop the seas somehow.

When exhaustion claimed man after man, he still sat merging with the dark, his arm blue with cold and rigid upon the life-sustaining oar. He could see neither crest nor trough with any certainty; sightlessly he guided the gig.

At times he shouted an order that spent muscles sought to obey; at times he swore; at times he laughed. It was at the mad sea that he laughed, laughed at it while it snatched at him. When the profound night shut down his laugh came oftener; it was a game he played, guessing the quick swirl beneath his car, anticipating the spin, beating it by a half-second. He was witched; he had no will in the matter; generations of vikings breathed untamed exhilaration upon him.

And these others let it be so, did not question, knowing Arnie of old. When he shouted, they flung at the oars, desperately, wretchedly. They recognized his leadership, gaped at his defiance. They feared the storm and the overwhelming green water; Arnie hated it all. Where there is hate is no room for fear; simply that. The exposure and the expectation of death made of them ugly but cowed brutes; they made of him a demigod. All through the long night he kept the tiller, his physical endurance long since played out——

Now and again the cook fought off his torpor and bailed for dear life. Except for his shadow of a voice, none spoke. That thin, reedy sound came eerily—

> "An' Jonah he make sech a bellyache
> The whale is a fit——"

The song lagged out. In a maundering tone—

"Y'ain't stayin' set on yer parcel, Jack!"

Then silence or the sound of a man coughing.

THE first streak of dawn saw the seas making less strongly, the tumult perceptibly subsiding. The same streak saw Arnie slide forward in a heap.

The wail of the little cook it was that brought him gradually out of oblivion. The sun had won through and rode high, whereby some of the cold was dispersed. Dully he stared forward at the wisp of humanity sitting in the bottom in a pool of plashing water, a parcel open in his lap and exhibiting yards of folded cheese-cloth. The misery of the cook gained coherence: he had believed this useless material to be his flowered vest and yellow gloves. He chanted his loss; two big tears welled up. The vest was hand-embroidered, by his mother—his mother who was dead. All the life had gone out of the man. Even Jonah had no potency now.

Drugged with weariness, Arnie blinked stolidly. He blinked at the babbling man; he turned his face and blinked at the sea. There was little thought in him. But as he blinked at the piling sea a picture rose upon it—the picture of a ship almost hull-down. He was not at all sure the ship existed, and yet it did not sponge out when he continued to stare at it. A strangely familiar picture it was.

"Oars!" he grated huskily.

He crawled to the sternsheets, fumbled for the make-shift tiller.

"There she rides. We—we'll go get the vest. Oars!"

Heads lifted, glowering. They made out the *Snowbird* wallowing to leeward. They made no sound in their throats; they merely glowered. One spat. At length—

"Like ——!" muttered a passionless voice, sucked of all interest.

"Oars," Arnie growled at them. "Row, —— yuh. The vest's aboard 'er."

They objected; they laughed; they consigned him to the devil. He ignored their words, their looks; cajoled them, swore at them, croaked insistently, "Oars!"

And somehow he had his way. Unreasonable!—but life had lost reason. The cook mouthed nonsense; tears ran down his salt-scaled face. They thrust out the oars, plied them without care, laughed when Arnie laughed —and rowed.

By the time they reached the bark, Arnie's pointless obsession had broadened into something bigger. He watched the *Snowbird*, crippled in all her yards, a maimed and beaten thing, stays chafed and broken, the mizzen-top sliced clean off and dragging the vessel at a perilous angle, her bows all but immersed.

In some manner the vest that the cook had lost grew into the ship that the captain had lost. He saw Captain Miant's stricken face once more, heard his haunted voice. He knew what it was to lose all that life contained. The thought grew; it was the wildest thought that astonishing head had ever conceived. The ship that was to sink had not sunk. There was no sense in it—but there she was, the old man's wife and sweetheart!

Board her the men would not; the desire to live had revived in them. But Arnie bullied them into backing the gig toward the dangling falls of the after davit. Into them he leaped and clambered upward. Hard on his heels clambered the cook.

Devastation, ruin on every hand! While the cook on hands and knees worked toward the galley door blocked by fallen tackle and all manner of débris, Arnie found an ax and swarmed into the slack and tangled mizzen-shrouds. Down below the others shouted at him, demanding luridly what he wanted there.

"Sea-room. I'm going to take 'er in," he answered them, and fell to.

They spewed vituperation at him then. He made no answer; he needed all his strength. He chopped and chopped. Rope by rope the upper structure twanged and gave way. Up and

up he moved on the treacherous ratlines. The cook had gained the galley and come forth triumphant. Arnie cared nothing for that; he had forgotten the vest. He would save the ship. His spirit rose. He would sail her in.

Seeing him, the ineffectual cook came to his aid, deposited his cherished bundle in the wheel-house and fell to singing of Jonah as he sawed at halyards with a knife. Down in the gig the men ceased to revile. They could not go without these two. Reluctantly they came up the chains, silent, uncomprehending.

In two hours the snapped mast went by the board, and the bark fairly shook herself and righted, still down by the head. Done for, fagged to stupor, the fragment of a crew walked the fore-top-sail sheets back to the winch and got the canvas partly spread. The jib was in tatters, but Arnie's crazy laugh found echo as from the loft was dragged some cloth cut fore-and-aft. They bent it to the gaff.

"Sea-room!"

That was the burden of Arnie's hoarse refrain. And sea-room they had. To the stub of the mizzen they stretched a grim-looking spanker. The bark found her head. A man was sent to the wheel. A useless attempt it looked with the stern kicking out of the water.

"All hands trim ship!" bellowed Arnie. In his ear a sailor snarled:

"What in ——, Sondheim! You'll send 'er down! She's derelic'. I'm fer takin' tuh the gig now. Bus' my top-lights, ain't she founderin'?"

"The gig's yours," was all Arnie would say.

He levered the forward hatch off and was heaving at the sacks of cornmeal.

"Overboard with it! Fishfood, mates!"

Habit told among them. Over it went, sack after sack. The cook halted them with a call to dinner. He was singing and crowing in the most excited manner; his vest was stowed carefully away again. His watery eyes watched Arnie in a sort of worship. He limped with rheumatism, and fever burned bright in his cadaverous visage. When one of the men sprawled over the table dead asleep, he took the fellow's place at the hatchway and struggled to the rail with sacks he could not lift.

Sullenly the bark's bows lifted. At sunset the vessel gained steerage and spoke the shifting wind. Arnie himself took the wheel and hove the ship in stays. Lumberingly they came about and stood to the north, taking much water as they rolled.

Four beaten, strength-sucked fellows lay fallen where the last duty had found them. Death could not have been deeper than their sleep. Propped at Arnie's feet, the little cook did his best to keep awake, jabbered inanely, sang in snatches through cracked lips, collapsed at length. Alone on a condemned ship's deck, his yellow hair matted in curls to his head, Arnie steered without a compass, without chronometer, without sextant. Until dusk the silence of the sea shared his vigil. Darkness drew down, a bright star appeared. On, on crept the bark—a bare four knots an hour, but with the ocean under her keel when by every law it should have been above her rocking masts and every man on her buried in green fathoms.

A foolish smile played about Arnie's mouth. An automaton he was in very truth but for the sleepless power of his appalling memory that churned up his imagination and held him to his task. That memory harkened to the wind soughing by:

"*Capitán* Arrrnie.—*El Capitán* Arrrnie—*mio* Arrrnie—" it purred at his shoulder. Lelona's voice that the storm and the cargo had lost to him. They made northing, northing—and San Carlos lay far to the south.

She would never know—would never know he had earned the kiss—and more—more—The cook had his vest—a pretty vest—flowered—loving hands— The captain—the captain that had been—should have his ship—if the seams held—what a sound the water made in the hold—Captain Sondheim would bring her in——

It was then that the odd smile touched his lips—in the starlight. Not good enough for a berth aft—aye, and the sticks knocked out of her! Wouldn't take the job for a thousand—He laughed maudlinly at this joke. But it was no joke. He cared nothing for money. He was master; that was it, master of the *Snowbird!*

Came one to relieve him. But he would not leave the wheel-house. They had found a compass and would have stood straight in for the coast but for his overweening determination to lay her in through the Golden Gate. He slept cramped up next the wheel, slept in cat-naps from which he jerked up to scrutinize the compass. They whispered but did nothing; they could not navigate the vessel themselves.

But they were not as given to discipline as they had been; it was not to be expected. They even took turns occupying the captain's cabin, and one of them ransacked the captain's closet and discovered four dark-colored bottles ranged atop a shelf. Arnie knew nothing of this; and in no time the bottles stood empty, while a certain odor pervaded the cabin and remained for days.

In Arnie a great wonder had been born, a joyous wonder. A miracle had happened. The sea he hated, the sea that had spurned him for seventeen years had been but chastening him. Now it heaped upon him all in a moment the glory of the impossible. The old man would not have him as mate. But the sea had made him at one full step a captain. They would see, all of them, the unbelievers, those who did not trust him; they would see for themselves. He was sailing away from Lelona—aye, but only to

sail back, a captain. He had lost a kiss; but there would be thousands when he stood on the after deck and brought his command to anchor off San Carlos. She would look and see him. Afterward she would sail away with him——

The whispering men stared at his hollow eyes with the dark rings under them. They said, "Aye, aye, sir!" without knowing why. They made way. Those eyes were not natural. When Arnie laughed aloud, forgetting his haggard weariness, they feared him a little. He was thoughtful of them, but he was not natural.

The wind held; the sea gained no more in the hold; the days crept by. Fear lost its edge and softened to doubt; doubt was molded into hope; hope sprang suddenly into belief. The *Snowbird* did not founder; she wallowed in a nauseating swing from bilge to bilge; she made her four knots——

A MESSAGE from the dead reached the owners on the San Francisco waterfront. A message from the living signed by Captain Miant and despatched from a port in Mexico had related the abandonment of the fast-sinking bark. Now in a blaze of sunlight they saw for themselves. No room for question; the *Snowbird* it was.

They came over the side. quite a crowd of them, owners of other vessels as well, eager to see and to hear. Abandoned by all three officers! Navigated by a common seaman! They agreed that the performance was astounding.

"I want him, Reynolds. Give me first bid. You have Miant and Lairton—good men. See the fellow's ingenuity." They pointed out this and that.

"Miant and Lairton! I guess not," chuckled Reynolds. "Didn't this man show them both up? You'll have to bid for Miant, Ross—Hey, Jack, where's the cap'n?"

A lounging hand waved them aft. From the region of the galley a thin pipe quavered on the light breeze:

"Was Jonah, I wonder, a prophet, by thunder,
Or was he a —— of a wha-a-aler?"

They strode down the companion and pushed on each other's heels to get into the cabin. Arnie stood up to greet them. He was grinning, grinning out of bloodshot eyes, swollen and dark-ringed in the sockets. They stopped dead and stared at him. Noses uptilted to sniff the air. Some one pronounced his name, "Sondheim!"

Reynolds snorted at sound of the name and said something under his breath. His investigating glance settled on the row of dark-colored bottles atop the closet.

"Sondheim? Arnie Sondheim? That explains these then," and he gestured toward the bottles. "Hm!" He had suddenly changed his demeanor. "Well, you got her in—with the kind help of the devil. You'll be asking salvage, of course. I expect we can arrange that satisfactorily. What do you say, Pitcairn? Five thousand?"

"Fair enough," nodded Pitcairn. He, too, had lost interest.

"I think," said Arnie, "I'll let that go if you've got a bark that—needs a master. I could take the examinations next week. Ready to report any time."

Reynolds narrowed his eyes, shrugged and turned to go.

"Bidding, Ross?" he asked in a dry tone.

"No—no, Reynolds, I think not. Pretty well stocked just now."

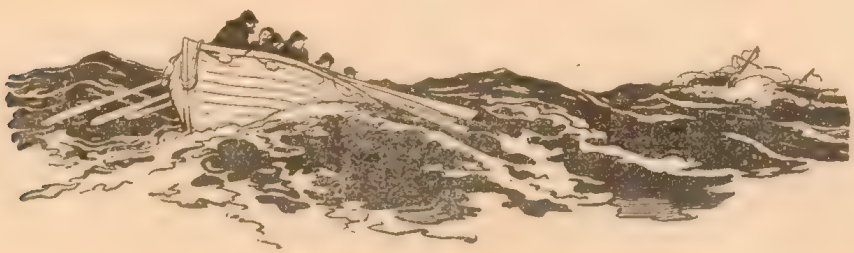
"Call at the office," Reynolds flung over his shoulder. "I'm sending out somebody to take charge."

He stopped short, spun about and thrust out his hand.

"I almost forgot. I congratulate you, Sondheim! Well done, of course!"

Arnie seemed dazed, but he got himself together somehow. He looked into Reynolds' face with a straight, hard scrutiny, then down at the outstretched hand.

"You'll have to excuse me," he said. "My hand's dirty. Good day, sir!"



the Tucandeira

by Arthur O. Friel

Author of "The Spider," "The Vampire," etc.

TAKE care, *senhor!*

Lift your hand from the rail! Quick! Now you are safe. You did not see that big black ant crawling toward you, but you would soon have felt him. You would not have slept at all tonight, for your whole arm would have been full of keen, throbbing pain. Let me knock him to the deck and step on him. There, now he can do no harm.

He is a *tucandeira*—the biggest, fiercest and most terrible ant to be found in all our Brazilian jungle. My foot has smeared him, but he must be an inch and a half long, and you can guess how powerful his jaws were. Yet his bite, bad as it is, is not so much to be dreaded as the torment that comes afterward—a maddening pain caused by the poison he throws into your flesh.

What this poison may be I do not know; but I do know it is so strong that some of the wild Indians use *tucandeiras*, along with certain roots and bark, to make the tips of darts and arrows deadly. I know too that many people say the bites of four of these ants will kill a man.

Yet I believed that it would take more than four of them to destroy the life of a strong man. You know how it is—one man may die from a thing that would only hurt another. And—well, let me tell you of something I once saw with my own eyes.

I WAS afloat in the flood-time, as I am now. But I was not sitting on the deck of a fine steamer like this, nor was I on my way down this great Amazon, with nothing to do but smoke and talk. Instead I was in a canoe, among the wild hills of the upper Javary region, speeding back toward the headquarters of old Coronel Nunes, my employer.

With me was a young comrade named Pedro, a rubber-worker like myself, who had been out with me on a long roving trip. We had met rough experiences, and now we had little food, few cartridges, and only one rifle; so that we did not wish to lose any time in reaching the end of our journey.

But we were not to end our trip as soon as we hoped to. Delay was not only waiting for us—it was coming to meet us.

Ahead of us was a rather nasty bend in the little flooded river we were following—a place where the water swirled against a steep cliff and was turned sharply away in a new direction. The stream had been washing against this cliff for so many years that it had eaten the stone inward, and the upper part now hung out over the current.

Under it the water sucked and boiled and whirled, making a place where it would be easy to capsize and hard to get out. We remembered it well, having had some difficulty there when we came up, and decided to go around it as fast as we could.

Just as we were making the turn, Pedro, up in the bow, yelled sharply. Another yell blended with his. Something struck us a thumping, glancing blow. We heeled over so suddenly that I almost went overboard. But the canoe stopped tilting, and I saved myself by a grab at its higher edge. Then we went whirling and bumping along the face of the cliff until an eddy swept us clear.

We were afoul of another canoe. It had

struck us slantwise, slid along our side, and nearly tipped itself over as well as us. Both Pedro and the other man had done the same thing—seized the other's gunwale to save his own craft; and now, while their grip held, we were locked together as if by steel hooks. That was all that saved either boat.

Luckily our dugout was a stout one with solid sides, and the grinding against the rock did no real harm. As soon as we found we were not wrecked we did the usual thing—blamed the other man. I asked him if he was blind, and Pedro wanted to know if he thought this was his own private river. He promptly told us both to go to the devil.

He said it, though, with a little twitch of the lips, as if the whole thing were a joke. Then he added:

"Before we start expressing opinions as to each other's ancestry and so on, let's get ashore and pump ship. Then we can bawl each other out at our leisure."

That was sense, for both of us had taken in much water when we tipped. So we headed for the other shore, ran into a small hollow between hills, got out, and turned the water out of our boats. This was easy enough for us two, but harder for the stranger; for he was alone and had a good deal of stuff stowed away which had to be taken out first.

He asked no help, and at first we offered none. Then, knowing the collision was an accident, we grew ashamed of ourselves, and I stepped toward him to give him a hand at his work.

He straightened and looked me in the eye, and I stopped as suddenly as if he had drawn a gun. He had made no threatening move—though his right thumb was hooked over his belt, and below that hand hung a long revolver—nor had he said anything. It was his look that halted me; a cool, piercing look that warned me not to come too close.

He was a big man, as tall and straight as Pedro, and even wider across the chest. His hair, his pointed beard, and his straight eyebrows were so black that they seemed to shine, and his dark eyes also appeared to gleam as he watched me. His skin, though, was not swarthy. Without his healthy tan he would have been very fair.

I saw all this in a glance, and saw also why he held me off. We were strangers, who had come upon him suddenly, nearly thrown him overboard, and spoken in ugly fashion. More than that, we had recently been in fights, and bore some marks of them in plain sight. We were unshaven and ragged, and probably looked hard and rough.

He was not at all afraid, but he was wary, and I could not blame him. I recalled now that since he landed he had not once turned his back to us. He was no fool.

"If we can help you, *senhor*, we will gladly do so," I told him. "We are not so bad as we look, and we do not want anything of yours. We are *seringueiros* of Coronel Nunes, who have been out on a foolish cruise and are now returning as fast as we can. Probably you have heard of the *coronel*."

His eyes seemed to bore holes in me while I talked. Now he nodded.

"Are you Lourenço or Pedro?" he asked.

"Lourenço, *senhor*," I told him, much astonished. "My comrade is Pedro. How did you know us?"

"What is your last name?"

"Moraes," said I.

He nodded again, smiled, and unhooked the thumb from his belt.

"The *coronel* told me about you," he explained. "I've just spent a few days at his place. He said you fellows were out here somewhere, though he had no idea where you might be. You sure are a hard-looking pair of brigands, I'll say. But I might have expected that, after what the *coronel* said."

"What did he say, *senhor*?" I grinned.

"He said you were a couple of rambling scamps who were quite likely to go poking into —— if you thought you would find it interesting. And he said if you did go there the devil would have to step lively or get his tail twisted."

We all laughed.

"I am afraid the *coronel* made you think us to be eaters of fire," said Pedro. "We are really peaceable men. Are you American, *senhor*, or English?"

"Half and half. My name's Locke. First name, Douglas. Ancestry, English and Scotch. Born in England, raised in the States. Been hopping all around the world for the last ten years, and got so used to moving that I couldn't stop now if I wanted to. I don't know where I'm going, and I'm here because I'm here. Now if you gents want to lend a hand with this bally tub I'll let you."

SO we helped him remove his equipment and drain the boat. It was a big craft, and almost too heavy for one man to handle—indeed, a smaller man than he could not have managed it at all in swift water. We found, too, that it was quite heavily loaded, and that he seemed to have much more food and other things than he needed. This appeared to be poor judgment; but after we finished the work, squatted and smoked, and told each other more of ourselves, we found that he had good reason for a large boat and many supplies.

He had come from the Ucayali, and intended to go in this craft all the way down the Amazon, paddling up any tributary stream where he thought he might find anything strange and new. Before leaving the Ucayali country he

had been scouting about between that river and the Huallaga for a big company which intended to apply for a great oil concession there. This he had done until he tired of that region, when he outfitted this boat, hired Indian paddlers, and started on his long journey of more than two thousand miles.

As the Indians would go only a certain distance from their homes, he had changed crews several times, and the last change had been a bad one. At Loreto he had been able to get only two—"bad actors," as he called them, who carried knives. When he decided to turn southward and explore this region the Loreto men became surly, and the farther they went the uglier they grew. Finally, two days before he met us, they tried to kill him. So after that he had to paddle alone.

He did not say what had become of those two cutthroats, and we did not ask. He saw us glance at his revolver, and he laughed, showing a double row of big white teeth.

"Say, I like you jiggers!" he said. "You know when not to ask questions. You've knocked around some yourselves."

We nodded. Then we told of what we had seen and done here on this wild river. We spoke of caves of vampires where we had been in danger of death; of a crazed Indian woman who lived in a hollow tree and poisoned all who came near it by thorns set in the ground; of a human ant-eater who lived with a monkey, dug gold, and killed three men who had shot that monkey and would have taken the gold. We told of savages who shrank men's heads, and of an old Scotchman in armor who had led us into battle against them.

We described how we had fought a whole village of drunken *caboclos* in order to free a girl from a cage where she was kept by her brutal father. Last, we spoke of a wonderful voice we had heard singing in the night beside a bay full of fireflies, and how we had found the singer to be a murderess.

"I'll say you gents have had some trip," said Senhor Locke, "or else you have the finest imaginations I've met up with."

"Do you mean, *senhor*, that we are liars?" Pedro asked softly.

"Ho ho! Not at all, *hombre*. Loosen up your grip on that rifle. Don't go on the prod until somebody says something. And let me give you a friendly tip: Start anything with me and I may bite your face plumb off. I'm hasty that way."

"It would take strong jaws to do that."

"Which same I have."

He grinned again, and a devil danced in his dark eyes. "Always pleased to demonstrate."

And he reached his left hand to a bush beside him, put a branch as thick as a finger into his mouth, and bit. Then he spat out a piece of wood.

I picked it up. It was cut through as if by a knife.

"Easy!" he laughed. "Try it yourself."

Pedro tried. He stepped over to the same bush and bit the same branch. He bit so hard that I could see the veins in his temples swell. Then he ground his teeth. Finally, angered, he yanked at the bush.

"Don't tear it up by the roots," the black-bearded man snickered. "Don't chew it, either. Just bite."

Pedro let go, spat out shreds of bush, and rubbed a bleeding lip. The branch was deeply dented, but not bitten off.

"Your jaws are better than mine," he admitted.

"Quite so. Let's see you try this one."

Rising, he stepped over to a tree with low limbs, picked one at the height of his mouth, clipped off some leaves with a knife, and set his teeth into the clear space. Then he lifted his feet from the ground and hung there, held up by the grip of his jaws.

For a minute or two he stayed in that position before dropping his feet. As he let go he said easily:

"It's really harder than the other. It gets your neck muscles too, you see."

"I see," said Pedro. "And I am not foolish enough to try it. I may want to eat again after a while, and how could I do it with a broken jaw and no teeth? *Por Deos, senhor*, you can bite like a *tucandeira!*"

"I happen to be good at it," he said, as we turned back toward the canoes. "Probably you have some stunt of your own that would make me look foolish. But it isn't gun-play, old timer, so don't— *chkk!*"

He choked and stumbled sidewise. I caught a glimpse of something around his neck. Then something flicked down past my eyes and yanked at my stomach so hard that I fell backward.

I turned as I fell, trying to put one hand to the ground and draw my machete with the other. But my arms were fastened to my body. I fell flat. Shrill yells sounded. Living bodies jumped on me. Something warm and heavy struck my head, forced my face into the dirt, and held it there.

SHOTS cracked out—six fast shots, followed by clicks of an empty gun. The weight on my head rolled off and thumped down beside me. I tried to heave myself up, but could not. So I twisted my face upward and looked.

Beside me was a naked Indian, lying very quiet. He had been the weight on my head—had sat on it until shot off. I tried to squirm over farther, but the other men holding me forced me down. All I could see was a mass of bush and a big bare foot that stepped within an

inch of my nose, then lifted and disappeared. I could hear other feet swishing around me and sounds of a struggle—gasps and blows. Then everything was quiet except for grunting voices.

Strong hands forced my own hands up behind my back and tied my wrists. I felt my machete drawn from my belt. The men on me got off. I scrambled to my knees and then to my feet.

Pedro and Senhor Locke were on the ground, both tied. The American's face was red and bloated from choking, but he was still trying to fight. One booted foot shot up and caught a savage in the groin, and the man yelped and fell backward. But others jumped on his legs again and pinned them down, and he could only wrench his shoulders uselessly.

I started toward him, but stopped short, held by the rope around my stomach. Then I looked around at the men who had caught us.

They numbered about a dozen, and, for *barbaros*, they were fine-looking men. They were of medium height, well muscled, beardless, very smooth-skinned, and naked except for belts and mats of woven fibers and bark. Their faces were grim, but not so brutal as those of many wild men I had seen.

This cheered me, for I thought they probably were not cannibals. So, having been in the hands of *barbaros* before without suffering any serious harm—though that was mostly because I was lucky enough to escape in time—I decided to put on a cheerful face and make the best of it.

"You had better stop fighting, Senhor Tucandeira," I said.

Why I called him Tucandeira instead of Locke I do not know—the name came naturally from my tongue.

"We are helpless, and we may get better treatment by not resisting further now. Later on we may have a chance to fight again."

He coughed and made a hoarse noise, trying to talk. Soon he managed to make his throat work as it should.

"Roped!" he snorted. "Roped and hogtied! We're a bunch of bally short-horns, I'll say! But I salivated a couple of 'em anyhow. Didn't hit you too, did I?"

I told him no. Glancing around, I saw two of our captors dead on the ground and a third holding a bleeding shoulder.

"Glad of it. They had a hangman's hold on my neck and I had to shoot blind. Hullo, I winged another in the shoulder! Not so bad—three hits out of six shots, and me being lynched at the moment. Now it's their turn, and I reckon they'll make us prance around some, what?"

"If you mean that they will torture us, I do not think so," I assured him. "Our Indians usually do not torture, but kill quickly."

Then I grinned, though I did not feel very funny, and added:

"You came here to see things, *senhor*. Now you are seeing them."

Whether he answered I do not know. One of the *barbaros*, who seemed to be the leader, stepped in front of me and looked me in the face. He had big staring eyes, and in them was a queer expression which I could not read.

For what seemed a very long time he stood there looking at me without once blinking. I stared straight back. At length I smiled and spoke to him, asking him what he meant to do with us.

He did not understand. I tried again and again, speaking slowly in Portuguese and Spanish, then in the Tupi *lengoa geral*, and finally using bits of other Indian dialect I had picked up at different times. The first two meant nothing to him, and he scowled as if he did not like their sound. The Indian words made his face brighten, but I saw that he did not understand these either.

As my hands were tied, I could not make signs with them, and thus I had no way at all of talking with him. So I turned to Pedro.

"I have tried everything I know," I said. "Can you speak any tongue I have not used?"

Pedro, who was sitting quietly and watching, began to grunt and click his tongue in some sort of strange language. The big-eyed leader left me and went to him. Soon he made several noises as if trying to answer. Pedro grunted away more rapidly, but the wild man was silent. Finally he turned away.

said my comradè. nderstood, but he does not,"

"I thought he u "I did not understand him."

The leader said something to his men. One of them, holding the noose of twisted fibers around my body, pulled on it and moved his head toward the American. We stepped over beside Senhor Locke. Pedro and another wild man came also, and we three prisoners stood there in a row, each held in a tight noose. The other *barbaros* picked up everything belonging to us, and four of them also lifted the two dead men by shoulders and feet. The ropes tugged at us again, and we filed away into the bush.

Noticing that they were carrying their dead, I guessed that we would not go far. I was partly right. We went only a short distance between the hills before we stopped and all the burdens were laid on the ground. But we had not reached any place where we were to stay.

Several of the men picked up the two bodies and went away. The rest of us waited. After a time the absent *barbaros* returned without the dead men. We fell into line once more, and now the real march began.

ALL the rest of that day we trudged on through the jungle. Nobody spoke. There was little use in talk, since we had no idea of what lay ahead and could not learn anything from our captors.

I noticed that the wild men did not seem very hostile toward Pedro and me, but that they treated Senhor Locke more roughly. If we stumbled, nothing came of it. If he stumbled, the wild man holding his rope yanked savagely at it; and every time the others looked at him they scowled. This, I thought, was because he had killed two of their mates and crippled a third. But I was to learn that there was another reason for it—a reason much older and born in them.

At last we stopped for the night. Then Senhor Locke spoke.

"What do you think of these people?"

We told him we did not know what to think; that they were not like any wild people we had ever met, and we could not guess why we were led on instead of being killed.

"I can answer that last part of it," he said. "They're taking us to their chief, I'll bet. Old Googoo-Eyes yonder is the head of the party, but he doesn't act like a heap big Injun chief and they don't treat him like one. I notice they seem to have it in for me in particular. Any idea why?"

We had no idea.

"Well, I'm getting a hunch. Guess I'll play it and see how it works."

The one he called Googoo was standing near, listening and looking at him unpleasantly. Senhor Locke spoke to him slowly in a tongue I never had heard. An astonished expression came into the leader's face. After staring a minute he answered.

The face of the Tucandeira wrinkled as if he did not quite understand, but he spoke again. Again Googoo replied. Others of the *barbaros* came closer and stood looking much interested.

I saw that the American had hit on a language that meant something to them. He grinned, squatted, and moved his head for Googoo to do likewise. Then he talked more in the same slow, careful way.

The talk went on for some time. I could not get any hint of what they said, or even of what tongue they spoke—it meant nothing at all to me. I could perceive, though, that they were having no easy time of it, and that each often had to repeat what he had said. Finally the Indian shook his head, said something more, arose and left us.

"Blessed is he who playeth a hunch," mused the Tucandeira. "Fellow-pilgrims, I have broken through the wall between them and us. They speak a sort of Quichua."

We stared and said nothing.

"You no savvy Quichua? It's the language that was spoken in Peru in the days of the Incas, before the Spaniards came. For that matter, it's still used—there are oodles of Quichuans scattered around the country. Some of them are quite civilized and some are not. These jiggers are emphatically not.

"There were all kinds of them even in Inca times, including a lot of independent chaps over here in the woods who wouldn't let the Incas themselves boss them. Maybe our chums here are some of that bunch, or perhaps they are descendants of the Incas who lit out for the timber after the conquest and sort of backslid.

"Anyhow, the language they speak is either very good or very bad Quichua—I don't know which, because all the Quichua I know is some I picked up over in the *montaña*, and it may be rotten. I couldn't get very close to them, but I learned two pertinent things—that they hate Spaniards, and that I'm out of luck."

"In what way do you lack luck, *senhor*?" I asked.

"They think I'm a Spaniard. My hair, eyes, and beard are so black they won't believe I'm anything else. Can't blame them for that—I've known Spaniards themselves to make the same mistake.

"These jaspers have been hating Spaniards for nearly four hundred years, and now they've caught a goat. Weather for tomorrow—unsettled, probably squalls."

"But can you not tell them you are American?" suggested Pedro.

"Sure. I did. They don't even know what North America is! They're bally boobs from away back. I'm a Spaniard to them, and that's all there is to it. But cheer up! You fellows are not in the same boat with me. They seem to realize that you're different—probably they know a Brazilian when they see him. You'll probably get a better deal."

"You have it wrong, Senhor Locke," Pedro said stiffly. "We are in your boat. We shall stay in it until we all get out or all go down. Am I right, Lourenço?"

I said, rather warmly, that he was. And the Tucandeira at once told us that we were a pair of fools.

"If you get a chance, beat it," he urged. "You don't owe me anything. I got you into this, anyhow. If I hadn't bumped you and brought you ashore you'd be away down the river now. Take care of yourselves, and don't bother about me."

"Fools we may be, but not cowards," retorted Pedro. "We three are partners until this thing ends. Now say no more about that. Where are they taking us?"

"As I said before, I like you jiggers," laughed Locke. "I don't know where we're going, but we get there tomorrow. I asked Googoo to untie our hands, but he refused. Suppose we may as well try to sleep a while, what?"

WE DID sleep as well as we could. To me it seemed that the night would never end, for my wrists were so firmly tied that I did not rest comfortably. When day came again I saw that my companions

also were hollow-eyed, and we all were stiff when we got up.

"I hate to ask any favors of that goggle-eyed billiken," grumbled Senhor Locke, "but I'm mortally tired of these bush handcuffs."

"Bite them off," smiled Pedro.

"Believe me, I would if I could get at 'em—and then I'd spit 'em into his face. But it takes some contortionist to get his teeth around to the small of his back, and I'm no boneless wonder. I say, Googoo old chappie, come here a minute. I want to kiss you good morning."

Googoo did not know what he said, of course, but he saw us looking at him and came closer. The American spoke again in the Quichua language. The Indian scowled, but slowly nodded. After searching us and taking everything from our pockets, he called another wild man, who came with my machete and cut the cords on our wrists.

Our hands dropped to our sides like lumps of wood. We moved our arms, bent our wrists, and worked our fingers to make the blood run more freely. While we did this Googoo spoke in a warning tone.

"He says we shall soon reach the end of this hike," said the Tucandeira, "and that if we try to fight or run we shall be killed. Let's not start anything. I'm agog to see what sort of dump we're headed for."

He and the leader talked again, and his black brows lifted.

"The plot thickens. Somewhere ahead of us is a female woman, and she's going to have something to say about us. Dog-gone the bally luck! Rudyard was right."

"Who is Rudyard?" I asked him.

"Rudyard Kipling, a fellow who sometimes writes poems. When he does he says a mouthful. A while ago he said that 'the female of the species is more deadly than the male.' He said two mouthfuls that time. A squaw is worse than a buck eight days in the week. I told you I was out of luck."

Googoo made another set of noises. Locke frowned and made him repeat. When the Indian had spoken three times the American shook his head.

"I don't get you at all, old kid. Sorry I didn't study my Quichua more."

Patiently the Indian talked with his hands. He pointed to the hair and eyes of us in turn, then shook his head. After that he pointed to his own hair and eyes, and again shook his head.

"Something about the woman and hair and eyes. Guess he means she hasn't any. Old as the hills and blind as a bat."

Then he laughed.

"Say, can you fellows cough like a jaguar?"

For answer Pedro made a noise so much like a jaguar that we all jumped.

"Fine! Say, we'll fix the old she-devil before she can think up any dirty work to put on to us. If she's blind she can't see us, of course. You fellows make a racket like jaguars, I'll hiss like a snake—and she'll drop dead. Very simple, what?"

We laughed. Googoo scowled.

"He knows we're laughing about the woman, and it makes him sore," said the *senhor*. "Better wipe off our grins, maybe. I don't want my hands tied again, and I'd rather not get rough until I've had a look at what's ahead. As I said before, I'm all agog."

We ate and resumed our tramp. Each of us still was held by the noose around his body, and *barbaros* with clubs watched us closely as we traveled on. The way led through the same broken country, but the trees were big and the undergrowth thin, so that we walked easily. At last we heard dogs barking, and our captors pushed on a little faster toward the noise.

Soon after this we came into a cleared place where houses stood. I had expected to see a big *maloca*, or tribal house, where all slept together; but there was none. Instead there were small houses of mud all around the clearing with a larger one in the middle. Men, women, children and dogs came to look at us as we passed, but none of them crowded us except the dogs, and a few kicks taught them to keep away.

We went straight on toward the big house in the center. A few feet from its low door we stopped.

Our guard laid all our property except our weapons in a heap on the ground. Googoo swung up to the doorway, halted outside, and spoke. A man's voice answered.

Googoo stepped back and gave an order to the men holding our ropes. The nooses were taken away and we stood unbound. Then we all waited.

A figure appeared in the opening, stooped, came through and straightened up. We saw at once that this was the chief. He was a man of middle age, taller than any of the others, straight as a blow-gun, steady-eyed and calm of manner.

Like his men, he wore only belt and mat, but these were broader and woven of finer material than theirs, and decorated with small bright feathers. His face was ornamented with two big blue feathers set into his nose, slanting upward and outward like a strange mustache.

He stood quietly, with arms folded, looking at each of us in turn while Googoo talked. His gaze rested longest on the Tucandeira, and his eyes grew narrow. He, too, believed our companion to be a Spaniard. Yet he said nothing until Googoo finished his report about us. Then, slowly and gravely, he spoke to Senhor Locke.

In the same solemn tone the American answered him. He talked for some time, partly with his tongue and partly with his hands. Once he made a slow movement of both arms

as if speaking of something very large and wide. Once he pointed to us and shook his head. Before he finished his face grew ugly, as if he talked of something hateful. Then he moved as if trampling on something and spat on the ground. When he was through he folded his arms like the chief and stood looking steadily into his eyes.

THE chief seemed thoughtful and a little doubtful. He said nothing. I thought he was decided what to do with us; and though I held my head high and stood as if unafraid, I was a little nervous, for I felt that he was unfriendly. But before he spoke again another thing happened.

Voices came to us—merry young voices somewhere behind the house. We heard quick footfalls too, and calls and laughter, as if girls were playing with one another. Then around a corner dashed several young women. As they saw us they stopped short.

"*Nossa Senhora!*" gulped Pedro.

"I'll be ——!" muttered the Tucandeira.

I said nothing. I was too much surprized for words.

The girl in the lead, *senhores*, was white!

Not only was she white, but she was strikingly beautiful. Her hair was wonderful—a rich, glossy red, and so long and thick that it seemed like a mantle of flame, rippling down almost to her knees. Her deep gray eyes were still full of laughter, and her little red mouth kept its smile as she looked us over. She was breathing fast from her running, her face was flushed, and her whole body glowed pink through the light tan on her smooth skin.

Unlike the Indian girls with her, she wore a little clothing; for she had a skirt of feathers reaching to her knees, and around her breasts was a wide girdle of some bright blue material. Her throat, too, was encircled by a necklace of small, irregular globes of gold.

This, I felt, must be the woman of whom Googoo had spoken. Instead of telling us she was bald and blind he had been trying to show us that her hair was not black like ours and that her eyes were neither black nor brown. The memory of what the American had said came to me and made me grin.

"I do not hear you hissing like a snake, *senhor*," I said. "And Pedro has forgotten to make his noise of a jaguar."

Senhor Locke told me I was a "boob" and asked me to shut up. But Pedro, still looking at her, laughed. She did not like it. Her face and throat flushed still more, her eyes snapped, and she stamped a little foot on the ground. Then she spoke to the chief, and her tone was angry. At once the men around us seemed to become hostile.

Before the chief could answer, though, the Tucandeira bowed gracefully to her and talked again. She looked surprized at the sound of her own language coming from his mouth. Then she glanced at us and laughed.

Lifting her hands, she covered her head as if to show us how she would look with no hair, then put them before her eyes. Our companion had explained our mistake in expecting to find her an old hag, and she thought it very funny.

The *barbaros* guarding us grinned too, and I saw a slight smile at the corners of the mouth of the chief himself. I felt, though, that they were pleased only because she was, and that if she had remained angry it might have gone hard with us.

"I'd advise you jiggers to go slow on the wit and humor," Senhor Locke said. "This little lady seems to be the whole works, and she was sore as a boil when she thought you were laughing at her. Be meek and mild, like me."

Then the chief said something to the girl, and she looked at us again more seriously. Her eyes rested only a moment on me, longer on my good-looking comrade Pedro, longest on the black-bearded man who spoke her tongue.

At length she replied in a rather doubtful tone, as if not able to decide something just then. The tall Indian nodded slightly, gave directions to Googoo, turned his back on us and went inside. After another long look at us the red-haired girl followed him.

Now that she was gone, I glanced around at the others. All were maidens excetp one older woman who had come up behind them, and all were Indians. Their hair was damp, and I judged that the party had been bathing in some private pool.

As we looked at them they giggled and went away toward the smaller houses. Googoo touched my arm, motioned with his head, and led us to a mud house where, he told us, we were to stay.

Everything we owned, except our weapons, was brought there also and left on the floor. Pedro's rifle, the rifle and revolver of Senhor Locke, and our machetes had been put into the house of the chief. Two men were left as guards at our door, one armed with a big club and the other with a bow. Googoo said something, then went away with the others.

"He says food will be brought," explained Locke. "Nothing for us to do now but sit around and wait for the chow. Say, stand in the doorway a minute and let me run through this pile of junk. I think they overlooked my pocket-knife."

We did as he said, filling up the doorway, talking, and pointing across the clearing. The guards looked that way to see what drew our attention. Soon the Tucandeira spoke again.

"All right, I got it. These jiggers didn't understand it because it's closed. It has a four-inch blade that might come in handly. Here, Lourenço, put your hand behind you."

I did so, and felt the knife come into my palm.

"Slip it into your pocket. Oh, don't worry about me—I'm heeled. I've got a sweet little automatic inside my shirt, under my left arm, where they never thought to look. Now let's get outside and smoke and look innocent."

The guards scowled and lifted their weapons as we stepped out. But we showed them that we only wanted to rest our backs against the wall, and they made no trouble. Squatting and smoking, we talked things over.

FIRST the Tucandeira told us what he had said to the chief. He had explained that he was not of Peru, but of a great country far to the north, and that he had come across a wide water to reach this place. Then, knowing that the chief felt unfriendly toward him because of the idea that he was a Spaniard, he had tried to help us by saying we were not countrymen of his but men of Brazil, and that we were not even his companions, but that we had met on the river just before our capture.

"You fellows think you're in my boat," he went on, "but I've got something to say about who rides with me when I'm heading into the rapids, and don't you forget it. If I'm due to hit the rocks that's no reason why you should drown too. Get me?"

We made no protest. The thing was done now, and it was useless to wrangle over it.

"What were you trampling and spitting on?" I asked.

"Spaniards," he laughed. "I played that card clear across the boards. I told him my country fought the Spaniards twenty years ago and mopped up the earth with them. That's true.

"But I made it stronger by telling him my people still hated all Spaniards, and that whenever we met one there was a holy riot; that we kicked their pants off and stamped their faces into the mud. That's not true at all, of course. But it's up to me to convince him I'm no Spaniard myself, and the best way to put that over is to let him think I hate 'em as much as he does.

"I don't know whether he fell for it or not. But what interests me more is the mystery of little Red-Bird. How the Sam Hill did she ever get here? She's as white as I am, and if she isn't American or English by blood I'll eat crow. Yet she speaks only Quichua, apparently, and she seems as thoroughly a native as the copper-colored girls. What do you fellows make of it?"

We made nothing of it, although we argued until women came with food for us. The food was good and there was plenty of it—a big clay pot of thick meat stew, broiled fish wrapped in large leaves, bananas, and nuts. We ate so much that we were sluggish afterward, but we were not too sleepy to talk. We asked the American what had been said between the chief and the girl when she looked at us so thoughtfully.

"I didn't quite get that," he admitted. "The old boy seemed to be asking her whether one of us would do, and she didn't know. We've been roped and dragged here for some purpose, but I can't dope out what it is. There's Googoo now. I say, old squirt, come here a minute."

The big-eyed Indian, seeing him beckon, came to us. The two talked for some time. Googoo smiled a little, but his answers did not seem to be very satisfactory. After a while a man came out of the chief's house and called to him, and he went at once to the doorway and disappeared inside.

"He says the girl is the Golden One," the Tucandeira told us. "She came to the chief years ago when she was very small. The chief was then a young man and had just become chief through the death of his father. It was the time when turtles lay their eggs, and all this tribe had gone to a big sandy *praia*, on a river west of here, to get these eggs.

"The chief went away alone to bathe, and while he was doing this a great turtle covered with gold arose in the water before him with the Golden One sitting in its back. It came straight to him, and the little girl jumped off and up into the chief's arms. Then the golden turtle sank and was not seen again. So the chief brought the Golden One home with him, and she has grown up as his daughter and bosses everybody, including the chief himself.

"That's Googoo's yarn. Of course that golden turtle stuff is all bunk invented by the chief, but Googoo believes it, and no doubt everybody else does. But I think the rest of it is partly true—the chief found the little girl at that time and place, and she sure does seem to be the big noise around here. And she is to decide what happens to us.

"Googoo sidestepped when I tried to pump him on that point. All he would do was to grin and say that what is to be will be. Here he comes again."

Googoo approached and spoke. The Tucandeira rose.

"Come on, you chaps. We're invited to attend another powwow."

WE WALKED into the house of the chief, finding him sitting in a hammock. The Golden One was beside him, gazing steadily at us and unsmiling. When we stood in a row before him the chief spoke to me.

I showed him I did not understand. Then he addressed Pedro, with the same result. He sat then for a moment watching Senhor Locke. The American turned to us.

"He wants to know just where you come from. I know you work for Coronel Nunes, but where are your homes?"

We told him, and he repeated this in Quichua. Then he kept on talking, and as I could not tell what he was saying I glanced around the place. It had a palm partition with a doorway leading into another room, and against that palm wall I saw something that worried me.

Behind the chief, leaning in a row near one corner, were our guns—and several others. All except ours were very rusty. Counting these, I found that there were six: four repeating rifles of the kind commonly used in our jungle, and two "trade" guns of large bore. On the floor beside them lay our machetes and the American's revolver.

Six men with guns had been here before us. The guns still were here. What had become of the men?

While I was thinking of this Senhor Locke stopped speaking. The chief gazed at each of us again. Then he moved his head toward me and spoke to the Golden One.

For a moment she and I looked into each other's eyes. I thought of what a wonderfully beautiful girl she was, and perhaps my face showed this; for she laughed very prettily and made a little teasing mouth at me. But then she shook her head, and I could see that she was saying, "No." The chief made a sign with one hand, and Googoo stepped out of the house.

Pedro's turn was next. She smiled at him too, but again said, "No." Then she and Senhor Locke stood looking at each other for a much longer time. And I was much surprized to see that the Golden One became confused.

A slow blush came into her cheeks, and her gaze dropped. She breathed quickly, her breast quivering as it rose and fell. She half-turned as if to go away, then faced us again and raised her eyes to his as timidly as any shy young Indian maid. When she spoke she hesitated, and her voice was so low we could hardly hear it.

The chief looked astonished and annoyed. He grunted a few words and moved a thumb toward Pedro. At once she recovered herself. Her eyes snapped, and she told the chief something in a decided tone.

The Indian's eyes went back and forth between Pedro and Senhor Locke. Though I did not know just what this was all about, I could see that a choice was to be made between my two companions; that the chief favored Pedro, while the Golden One wanted the American; and that I was out of it.

The light sound of bare feet at the door made us turn and look. Googoo had come back, and six other men with him. All were armed, all looked grim, and all watched the chief as if expecting orders. I slipped a hand into the pocket where that big clasp-knife lay.

"Looks like a squall," said the Tucandeira softly. "If they start anything I'll plug the chief. You chaps hurdle his hammock and grab your guns."

Glancing at him, I saw that his shirt was unbuttoned and the tips of his right fingers were inside it.

The chief sat still and argued with the girl. She stamped a foot and answered sharply. He sighed. An instant later my arms were clutched from behind. Too late I saw that the chief, without raising his hands from his knees, had lifted two fingers to show that Pedro and I were to be seized.

I kicked backward, wrenched myself out of the hands holding me and jumped for the corner where the guns stood. But I collided with the chief, who had risen and now swept his wiry arms around me. I trampled on his bare feet, tried to throw him and get past; but I might as well have tried to push away the crushing loop of a boa.

Hands clamped my wrists again from behind, and though I plunged and strained I could neither break free nor draw the knife. Then some man at my back got an arm around my throat and choked me until I fell.

When my head cleared again I was lying back against the wall, and two wild men were squatting on my hands with all their weight. Pedro, exhausted, was sprawling on the floor with three badly mauled *barbaros* holding him down. The sixth Indian stood between us with a club raised as if only waiting for a word to crush our skulls. Googoo stood between Senhor Locke and the chief, protecting the tribal ruler with his own body, and the Golden One had twined herself around the American and was trying to hold down his gun hand, in which he gripped a flat pistol.

Later I learned that only my jump toward the chief saved his life. I had leaped between him and the American, who had drawn his pistol and barely escaped shooting me in the back. Instantly the girl had thrown herself on him to protect the man who was a father to her, and after that there was such a whirling tangle of struggling men that he could not fire without danger of hitting me or Pedro.

NOT one of the *barbaros* had attacked him. Now he snapped out a question and a command. The girl answered in a pleading way. He jerked his head toward us and repeated his order, adding something else in a milder tone. She took her arms from him and stepped back, watching him. He slipped his pistol into a pocket and stood with hands empty. Then she turned and gave an order to the wild men holding us. They looked at her as if they thought her crazed, then turned

their eyes to the chief, who seemed as calm as ever. He and the Golden One talked, the chief quietly and the girl excitedly, and he nodded to the men. Slowly they arose and left us free.

"Take it easy, fellows," Senhor Locke advised us. "I think we'll come through without any more rough stuff. I'm getting the hang of this thing now."

We arose, set our backs to the wall, and breathed. Our American comrade began talking to the chief, pointing at us and shaking his head. After a time the chief spoke curtly to Googoo and his men. Looking surprized, they went outdoors.

The chief quietly sat down and listened to further things said by Senhor Locke. A long talk between them followed. The Golden One became shy again, standing with her gaze on the floor, glancing up quickly now and then and blushing as she met the eye of the black-bearded man.

Suddenly, at something the chief said, she paled, stared at the Tucandeira, opened her lips, then changed her mind and said nothing. Soon after that Senhor Locke nodded and turned to us.

"Come on, let's go," he said.

"Where?" I asked.

"Back to our shack. Everything's fixed up until tomorrow. Googoo and his gang will ride herd on us, but outside of that we're as free as if we were in jail."

Before we left, though, he put out his right hand to the Golden One. She took it, and they stood silent, looking deep into each other's eyes. They made the most striking pair I have ever seen, *senhores*—the man, white of skin and black of hair, square-jawed and strong and clean-limbed, and the princess of the tribe with her flaming hair and wide eyes, her dainty figure, and her clear skin glowing pink above and below her brilliant feather-dress and girdle. He smiled and spoke softly to her, and as he released her hand she looked both happy and afraid.

At the door of our own house the two guards were waiting for us. They had been among those whom we fought in the house of the chief, and they showed marks of the struggle; but their faces now were like wood, and they gave no sign of either friendliness or enmity as we passed between them.

"Well, gents, a merry time has been had by all, and now I reckon you want to know what it's all about," said the Tucandeira. "So I'll give you an earful. Boiled down, this is the situation:

"Our little friend the Golden One has reached the age when, according to the ideas of these people, she should take a man. In fact, she's well past that age, for I understand that the Amazon Indians mate at fourteen or even younger, while she must be at least seventeen. Up in my country that would be considered pretty young, but of course a girl matures quicker down here. Anyhow, the chief has felt —and perhaps she herself has—that it's about time she made some chap happy or miserable, according to the luck of the game.

"But the trouble was to find the man. She has flatly refused to hook up with any of the young sprigs in this social set. Can't blame her for that, either. She realizes she's white and far superior to any of them, even though she's known only their kind of life since she was a kiddie, and she refuses to become the squaw of any copper-skin.

"The chief is a wise old skate, and he understands. So he's ordered his men to rope in every white or near-white man they run across, bring him here with as little damage as possible, and let the little lady give him the once-over.

"Up till now they've drawn blanks. Several men have come and gone—and I've got a fat hunch that they didn't go far after they left here. They left their guns behind, as you probably noticed. Besides, you fellows say you never heard of these people, and if any of the chaps who were here got out again they sure would have talked, and the yarn would have gone around for hundreds of miles. They didn't suit the Golden One, and so they were just taken out and disposed of, or else my guess is wrong.

"I don't suppose it ever entered her pretty head that she was sending those fellows to death, but that's about what it came to. We'd be on our way to the same port right now, only she seems to be—er—slightly interested."

"She is more than interested, *senhor*," said Pedro. "You are the man she has been waiting for. I am not a woman's man myself, but I have met a few and I can read the signs. And I thank you, *senhor*, for saving us. I can see now that the one you call Googoo, and his men, were about to drag us away and crush our heads."

"Well, since you mention it, that's about the size of it. But forget that gratitude stuff — we're all in the same boat after all. The next move in the game is this: I'm elected to do a little stunt tomorrow just to prove that I'm worthy to be the Golden One's man. The chief can't get that Spaniard idea out of his head, and if the choice were left with him he'd pick you, Pedro, for the girl's partner. But she can't see it that way, so he figures to make me prove I'm a man before the wedding bells ring out. I don't know just what the stunt is, but he calls it the test of the *tucandeira*."

WE GLANCED swiftly at each other and back at him. My skin began to prickle and crawl.

"Judging from your squirmy expressions, I reckon the test is rather unpleasant, what? I

noticed the Golden One looked sort of upset about it too. I know bally well what a *tucandeira* is, of course. Do I have to let one of them bite me?"

"Not only one of them, *senhor*, but many," I told him. "I have never seen this test, but I have heard of it, for it is used by some of the Indian tribes of our river country. When a young man would take a wife he must put his arms into a cylinder in which many of those ants have been kept without food until they are even more savage than usual. If he can endure the torment he is considered fit to live with a woman."

"Ouch!" he muttered.

Slowly he made a cigaret, and slowly he smoked it.

"But that seems impossible," he objected when the cigaret was dead. "I have been bitten once by one *tucandeira*, and it put me in agony. I have heard that four *tucandeiras* can kill a man. How can any man be bitten many times and live?"

I could not answer this, nor could Pedro. We all squatted there for some time without speaking. Finally the American said:

"It may be possible after all. Perhaps the ants used are not all *tucandeiras*—they may be mostly other ants with a few of those bad fellows mixed in. Otherwise there are only two ways I can figure it.

"In the first place, the bite of friend *tucandeira* hurts like the devil. Death can be caused by too much pain, even without poison. The *tucandeira* gives you pain and poison too.

"Now this matter of pain depends altogether on your nerves. An Indian's nerves are nowhere near as sensitive as those of highly civilized folks, and maybe that gives him greater endurance, simply because he doesn't feel the same amount of pain a white man would.

"And as for the poison—well, these Indians have been living among these ants for hundreds of years. At one time or another they or their ancestors have been bitten a good many times, and no doubt they've acquired some immunity to the poison. The upshot of all this is that your jungle Indian can live through this *tucandeira* test when it would knock a white man dead. I bet that's the answer. Sounds reasonable, what?"

"You may have it right," I agreed. "But that only makes it worse for you. You are a white man, and your fathers have not been bitten by these horrible things. And to speak plainly, *senhor*, I do not believe you will be given any false *tucandeiras* in your test. They will all be real ones."

"Which means that they will kill me," he nodded, "unless I can dope out some way to beat the game. Cheerful old joker, that chief. Do you jiggers know any antidote to that ant-juice?"

We thought, and after a time an idea came to me.

"I know of nothing except this," I said. "Most of the wild men of our jungle use the blow-gun and poisoned darts in hunting. The poison they use will quickly paralyze and kill anything after it enters the blood, but still it does not make the animal or bird unfit for food. Different tribes make this poison in different ways, but I know that at least one tribe makes it from certain roots and *tucandeiras*.

"Now it sometimes happens that a wild man wants to strike down an animal but not to kill it—he wants to keep it alive. He weakens his poison with water, so that the animal falls and lies still but does not die. When he has secured it he puts a little salt in its mouth, and this makes the beast lively again. It may be, *senhor*, that salt would weaken the effect of the *tucandeira* bites."

He slapped his thigh.

"Good dope!" he said. "It's worth trying anyhow. Yep, I'll give it a whirl just to see if it works."

Pedro and I, however, had the same idea, and we told it to him—that the best thing to do was to try to escape in the night. There were only two guards, and he still had his pistol, while I had his knife. But he shook his head.

"There are several little things against that plan," he said. "Unless they're bigger fools than I think, they'll put more guards here at night. We couldn't kill them all without a racket, and then the whole outfit would be on us. Besides that, I promised the Golden One I wouldn't use my gun if she'd protect you fellows. She and the chief took my word for it, and I have a bad habit of keeping my promises.

"And that isn't all. I'm going to take that test and win the little lady if I can. She's decidedly worth it."

There was nothing more for us to say, so we said nothing.

"You see, there are two sides to this thing—my side and hers," he went on after a pause. "As you say, Pedro, she seems to have found her man. Like you, I've known a few women and can read the signs. She's in a tough position here, marooned among these copperheads, and now that she's met the one man she wants I'd be all kinds of a bally skunk to duck and leave her in the hole. Life would never be the same to her again.

"For that matter, the chief might get sore at her for her part in saving us, and if he did he'd make it —— for her. Nope, I can't cut and run, fellows. It just isn't done, that's all.

"And as for my side of it—well, this isn't the first time folks have tried to rope me into marriage, but it's the first time I ever wanted to be roped. Up in my own country I've had considerable money at times, and I shouldn't

wonder if there might be a few dollars of mine left in one or two banks right now; and besides that, my folks are rather prominent in a way. That means that I've had to step lively a few times to stay unmarried.

"I've nothing against women, but until now I haven't met up with any that I wanted to travel with. Mostly they're insincere, artificial, and worshipers of money and social position. But the Golden One is a real honest-to-God *girl*, uncontaminated by mercenary ideas, and a whizzer of a beauty besides.

"Run away and leave her? You couldn't drive me out of here with a machine gun until she's ready to go out with me.

"Tell you what I'll do, though. If you jiggers are set on making a break tonight I'll help you all I can, short of shooting up the place. No? All right. Then I'll start dolling myself up for this ant-fest."

HE BEGAN rummaging among his goods, whistling away as if the coming ordeal were something pleasant. Out from a big rubber-covered bag he took smaller bags full of salt. Leaving these hidden behind other things, he went to the door and argued with the guards until one of them yelled to some one. Soon women came with four big jars of water.

"Strip and take a bath," he told us. "I convinced these chaps that we needed water for bathing and drinking, so we'll have to make good."

Each taking a jar, we bathed, while the guards watched us from the doorway. After a while they turned away and went back to their places. Then Senhor Locke slopped most of the water from his jar, and into it he swiftly emptied the bags of salt.

"That ought to make brine that would pickle a horse," he said, beginning to dress.

"It will make you sick if you drink much of it," said Pedro.

"Drink it? Lord, I'm not going to drink it, but pickle my arms in it. If the salt is an antidote to the ant-juice, the chances are that they don't like it and won't chew me up so bad. Savvy?"

I was doubtful about that value of this, but I said nothing. It was worth trying, and I knew of nothing else. When he was clothed again he stirred the salty water with his hands and then rubbed it into his arms up to the shoulders.

After that we lay in our hammocks and talked. The time dragged. At length the Tucandeira arose and dug out from another bundle a bunch of cards. As he did so, a small rubber bag rolled out on the dirt floor. He picked this up, and suddenly he laughed as if a bright idea had struck him. Glancing out at the *barbaros*, he slipped the bag inside his shirt. Then he brought the cards over and began showing them to us.

They were colored pictures of many things—tall buildings, men and horses, steamboats, mountains, and so on. They had been printed from photographs taken in his country, he said, and he had brought them from America to give to Indians who might do little jobs for him. We were so much interested in them that we did not know any one else was there until a soft voice spoke at the door.

The Golden One stood there smiling at us. She had come to look again at her man. Pedro and I arose and offered her our hammocks. Then we went outside and squatted against the wall.

The guards were uneasy. They grunted to each other, moved several times, and finally stood where they could look inside and watch us too.

We heard the man and the girl behind us talking and laughing for a time, and then they seemed to speak more seriously. After that we paid no more attention to their voices, for we began to pass the time by talking about the *barbaros* whom we could see passing about the village. None of them gave much attention to us, except a few girls who gathered at a distance and giggled.

At last we noticed that the pair in the hut behind us were not talking. Then came a little noise that sounded much like a kiss.

We winked at each other, and the grins were still on our faces when the Golden One came out laughing and blushing and looking very lovely. She saw our smiles, blushed still more, and ran swiftly away to the house of the chief.

"Well, *amigos*, I win," said the Tucandeira, coming out.

"We knew that, *senhor*," laughed Pedro.

"Oh slush; I don't mean what you think I mean. I bet you jiggers that the Golden One was American or English, and I win that bet. She's American!

"See these post-cards? I showed them to her too, and she recognized some things right away and called them by their right names.

"See this one of the cow-puncher and his horse? She knew the horse right off the bat—called it 'horsie,' as a little kid would do. She's never seen a horse since she came here, because there aren't any in this jungly river country; so she must remember those she saw before she left the States. And she's never seen a steamer here, of course; yet she recognized that too, and called it a ' 'teamboat.'

"Besides that, she knows part of her name—says she is 'Baby Mary.' And she remembers a man she calls 'daddy' lying dead in a canoe with a stick in him—an arrow, of course—and awful black birds following overhead for a long distance, and then the canoe grounding on sand where she got out and a tall Indian finally

found her. "Poor little kid, she must have had a devil of a time! Good thing a jaguar didn't find her before the chief did."

"Did she tell you anything about the test?" I asked.

"Yes, some. It's just what you fellows predicted. One thing in my favor is that they haven't any starved ants on hand, so they've got to use some that have eaten recently. Men are out catching them now. Not that it will make much difference, but every little bit helps. Ho-hum. 'Most time for the chuck-wagon to roll around again."

It was nearly time to eat, as he said. Soon women brought us food, and he showed that nothing ailed his appetite. When we finished we found that his guess had been correct—the guards were to be increased at night. Six of them, heavily armed and led by Googoo himself, relieved the two who had watched us through the afternoon.

Darkness came; a cloudy night with a watery moon. We got into our hammocks and slept.

Twice in the night I awoke to hear a soft slopping sound and found the Tucandeira soaking his arms again. I said nothing, knowing that the sound of my voice would bring the *barbaros* in at once.

How many times he got up I do not know, for I heard him only twice. When day came, though, I noticed that he seemed sleepy and his arms were caked white with dried salt.

AFTER our morning meal he yawned several times, and a smoke only seemed to make him sleepier than before. Snapping away the cigaret, he growled disgustedly, stretched himself, and muttered:

"Might as well start it now. Stand in the doorway a second, gents."

We blocked up the entrance, lounging there lazily a minute until he said, "All right." When we looked back he was chewing on something, and as he came out I saw that one cheek was swollen.

Thinking he had taken a mouthful of tobacco, I did not puzzle over it, except to wonder in a lazy way why he had hidden from the guards. I noticed, though, that his sleepiness was leaving him and his eyes were growing brighter.

Squatting against the wall, we waited for something to happen. We waited for some time. The *barbaros* went about the village as usual; but all looked often at us, and we knew they too were waiting for the test to begin. Once the Golden One came to the door of the chief's house and waved a hand, but she did not come near us. Pedro and I dozed a little and the Tucandeira sat silent, chewing all the time.

After a while two men approached the house of the chief, squatted, and began to beat drums. At that the village woke up. Men came from all the huts, followed by the women and children.

"There goes the overture," said Senhor Locke, rising. "Curtain goes up in three minutes. Being the star performer, I'll slide into my dressing-room and prink a bit. Let me know when the bally audience is ready."

The bally audience was ready quite soon. The chief, the Golden One, and an old man carefully holding something round stood at the chief's door. The two drummers squatted in a clear space before them, and beyond this open space all the other Indians stood close together, all looking toward us.

Then the chief raised a hand toward Googoo, who was still on duty with all five of his men. Googoo started toward us.

"They come, *senhor*," I called.

He came out, nodded easily at Googoo, and strode away toward the chief. We walked behind him, and the guards behind us. I noticed that his arms no longer glistened with the dry salt, and wondered if he had washed it off.

Later on, I learned that he had soaked them again, then partly dried them with cloth, so that the salt was all there but was damp and did not show. Also, he still carried that big chew in his mouth.

Straight up to the Golden One he went, spoke to her as if telling her not to worry, and smiled. She smiled in answer, but the smile quickly died and she looked very sober. The chief said something and moved his head toward the old man, who seemed to be the *pajé*, or medicine-man, of the tribe.

The American put out his hands. The old man pulled open a sort of cloth at the end of a woven fiber tube, slipped the tube quickly up the white man's arms, pulled the cloth tight and tied it firmly. This cloth made a sort of sleeve, preventing the ants from running beyond the place where it was tied. When this was fastened the *pajé* stepped back. At once the drummers stopped beating.

With the end of the drumming it seemed very quiet. We could hear the breathing of the *barbaros* around us, but nothing else. Nobody spoke or moved. Every eye was on the face of Senhor Locke, every ear waiting to hear him whimper with pain.

He stood silent, moving no muscle except those of his jaws, which chewed away steadily. As the minutes dragged by he still made no sound, but his face changed a little. His eyes became set.

His lips twitched slightly.

Then his jaws stopped and their muscles stood out before his ears. Under his tan his skin grew gray. I knew the salt was not keeping off all the ants. Somehow I felt sick.

But he did not flinch. He neither groaned nor writhed. Rigid as a rifle he stood. The

only sound he made was his hoarse breathing, which was deep and slow, with a sort of quiver in it.

A low murmur went around the circle of watching Indians. They were whispering and speaking among themselves. Yet nobody moved, nobody talked aloud.

More time dragged past—how long I do not know. I feared to see him stagger and fall, overcome by poison and pain. But he did not waver, and it was another who was first to move.

That other was the *pajé*. At last he came forward, peering into the eyes of Senhor Locke, which stared straight past him. Then he loosened the cords which held the sleeve, drew the cloth down carefully to keep the *tucandeiras* inside the cylinder, flipped the tube suddenly away and swiftly closed it.

SLOWLY the *senhor* turned toward our hut. The Golden One sprang to his side, laughing and joyous. But he made no answer to her eager talk, nor even looked at her. He stalked to the house, went inside, and dropped on his knees beside a water-jar.

We trailed close behind him, and after us came the crowd, talking loudly now and anxious to watch him longer. But we turned in the doorway and blocked it, ordering them all away. We would not let even the Golden One come in. We knew our comrade was going to be sick.

And sick he was, *senhores*. We heard him splashing water and retching. Yet even now he did not groan. I told Pedro to go to him while I held the door, which I could easily do because the opening was narrow and I am broad; and besides I was now in an ugly temper, for I knew from experience how the *tucandeira* bite hurts, and I would gladly have kicked some of those Indians in the stomach if they had crowded me.

But they kept back. The American had endured the test and would be the Golden One's man, and we were his companions, and not even the armed guards thought it best to go too far. I had some trouble, though, with the Golden One herself.

She was furious because I would not let her pass. She tried to push me aside, and when she could not do that she cried out at me in anger, stamping her foot and looking at me with eyes blazing. I tried to tell her she could see the *senhor* when he was ready, but since she did not understand my language this meant little to her. I half-expected her to order Googoo and his men to throw me out of the way, but she was too sensible to do that—probably knowing that a serious fight would follow.

Finding me stubborn, she grew quiet and listened to the sounds from inside. Then she spoke sharply to the others, and they went away, looking back often. After that she called to the *pajé*, who now was talking to the chief. He, too, went somewhere, returning soon with two small clay jars, one of which held liquid and the other a sort of paste. Knowing this must be medicine, I let him pass. Before I could stop her the Golden One slipped in after him.

Senhor Locke now was in his hammock, looking weak but able to smile a little at the girl. The old man gave him a drink from one jar, then smeared his arms with the paste.

Soon the white man appeared to feel better. The grayish look left his face, and some of the hard lines around his mouth smoothed out. He spoke to the Golden One. She swiftly bent and kissed him.

"I think, Lourenço," said Pedro, "that we are not needed here. Senhor Locke, we are going to walk."

"Go as far as you like," he answered. We did.

We walked all about the village. The guards made no attempt to stop us—indeed, Googoo alone came with us, acting more friendly now. Every one else seemed friendly too, and some of the *barbaros* gave us *jabuti-pûhe* and *cumâ* and other fruits to eat. Though we could not talk to them, we managed to exchange ideas by making signs and wrinkling our faces, and the time passed pleasantly until we decided to return to our own hut.

There we found the Tucandeira sitting up in his hammock and talking with the Golden One, who was in the same hammock and very close to him. Except that his arms looked swollen he showed hardly any effects of the ant-bites. I was astonished, even though I had had some experience myself with Indian remedies.

"Has the pain left you, *senhor?*" I asked.

"Mostly. The flesh is tender and my bones ache some—sort of a rheumatic feeling—but it isn't half-bad now," he said cheerfully. "That old medicine-man is a ring-tailed whizzer, I'll say. I think the salt helped a good deal too—kept off some of the bugs. But the dose I got was plenty, thanks. If it hadn't been for the coca I might have squirmed some."

"The what?"

"Coca. Coca and a little lime. You saw me hide it in my shirt and chew it. I learned that little trick from Indians over in the Andes. It gives 'em tremendous endurance; I've seen them go forty-eight hours without sleep by chewing it.

"Me, I don't like the stuff, but I brought some away with me for emergencies. It's no painkiller, but it sure helps a chap to hold out."

Then he laughed and glanced at the Golden One.

"This little lady and I both put one over on each other," he said. "I've owned up to her about the salt and the coca, and she's admitted that she could have saved me all the pain. She says there is a bitter vegetable oil

that all ants hate, and she thought of smuggling me some to smear on myself so that they wouldn't bite. Then she changed her mind because she wanted to find out whether I was a sure enough he-man. She never realized that the ants might kill me.

"But now everybody's satisfied, and the next thing is a huge wedding. You jiggers can get howling drunk and stay that way for the next three days. Everybody else will."

"That will be very sad," grinned Pedro. "But what will you do after that, *senhor?* I do not believe the chief will let her go out with you."

"Won't he?"

The other's eyes narrowed.

"He'd better! If he cuts up rough all bets are off, and he'll find some lead pills in his gizzard. I reckon I've got something to say about where my own wife lives. What's more, she's keen to go out, and now that I've won her I'm betting the chief will come through like a man."

HE SEEMED to be right. At least, the chief made no objection to the marriage celebration. For the next three days, as the *senhor* had said, there was much feasting and drinking, dancing and games. We did not become "howling drunk," for we knew better than to take too much of the strong liquor brought out by the *barbaros*—it is easy to start a deadly fight between different races when all are drinking. Yet none of the Indians became quarrelsome from their liquor. It made them like happy children.

Some put on huge masks of cloth made from the inner bark of trees, painted red and yellow and black and shaped like heads of beasts or birds. The chief himself donned a great headdress of bright parrot and toucan feathers, painted his face and chest, and changed the two blue feathers in his nose for flaming red ones. These slipped out of place after he had taken a number of drinks and made him look very funny, one pointing at his left eye and the other drooping toward his mouth.

Googoo became very drunk indeed, so that his big eyes bulged like those of a tipsy owl, and he reeled around with Pedro and me all the time, hiccoughing and blabbing many things which we did not understand at all. The men masked as animals pranced around on all fours and tripped other men so that they flopped on their faces.

The joke which every one enjoyed most, however, was Pedro's idea. Through Senhor Locke, who did not know why he wanted it, he obtained the fiber rope which had been looped around the American's body while we were prisoners. Then, catching the *senhor* and the Golden One standing side by side, he threw the noose over both of them, yanked it tight, and gave the end of the rope to Googoo.

At once the rest of the gang which had brought us there came staggering forward and grabbed the rope also. Then, yelping like a flock of crazy toucans and falling over one another's feet, they drove the pair around the village while every one screeched with laughter.

The Golden One and her black-bearded mate enjoyed this as much as we. When the loop was loosened Senhor Locke laughed:

"I'm going to keep this rope. It's a queer wedding ring, but it's the only one we'll have until we get out to where I can buy one of gold and have our knot tied according to white man's law."

And he did keep it. When we all went out together he wore it coiled over one shoulder and across his chest.

Yes, *senhores*, we all went out. After the *festa* ended and every one at last was sober, the Tucandeira and the Golden One talked long with the chief. Finding that she was eager to go out into the great world with her man, the ruler of the tribe slowly nodded and gave orders to Googoo. And the next day at dawn we left the town.

The chief himself led the long file of men who went with us. Every man in the village, except the *pajé* and a few others who were old or not strong, swung away through the bush to the place where they were to say farewell to their Golden One. Some carried the few things Pedro and I had had when caught; others bore the larger packages belonging to Senhor Locke; and still others conveyed much food for us to eat after we should leave them. It seemed that every one in the band carried something except the chief, the girl, and we three men. We traveled at a steady jog through the cool jungle shade, and it was not late in the day when we reached the spot where our canoe had been left.

There our weapons were given back to us and the boats were loaded again. When all was ready Pedro and I pushed out and hung to an overhanging limb.

The Golden One took a place in the middle of her man's big canoe. He stepped aboard, lifted his paddle, and nodded to the men holding it to the bank. But the chief spoke, and they kept their grip on the boat.

Then the chief took from a man beside him a bundle, which he gave to the girl. He spoke again, slowly and gravely, pointing once to the thing he had given her. Then the men holding the boat shoved it away. We sunk our paddles in the water and moved out into the river.

Silent, motionless, with arms folded and head high, the chief watched us go. The men around him all stood still as the trees. Only when the Golden One called to them and waved a hand in farewell did they move. Then their hands rose together, a shrill yell broke from them, and the

swift current swept us around a bend and we saw them no more.

It was not until we reached the headquarters of our old *coronel*, several days later, that we learned what was in that package given by the chief in parting. The *coronel* gave us all a warm welcome, made Senhor Locke and his bride at home in his house, and hastily presented the Golden One with some civilized clothing left there by his daughter Flora, who was at school far away in Rio. Then, as we all sat talking by the lamp-light, Senhor Locke opened the bundle and looked over several things it contained.

"The chief said," he told us, "that he found these things at the time when the Golden One came to him on the back of the golden turtle. That means, of course, that he found her daddy's body—or what was left of it—and took this stuff from it. Seems to be mostly junk. Guess this black note-book will give us the best tip."

He ran through it while we talked of other things. Suddenly he whistled.

"Ye gods and little horned-toads! Mary girl, your father was 'Red Jim' McMurray!

"He was a big mining man—I've heard of him. When he was away past forty he married a young doll who had roped him in for his money. She made life miserable for him. Finally he disappeared, taking his little daughter and leaving a note saying he was going to a place where he'd never see another white woman as long as he lived. And he sure did!

"He fixed his will, too, as I remember it, so that if he should be declared legally dead his wife wouldn't get his money, and she fought like a wildcat to bust that will. Before the case could be settled she got killed in an automobile smash. And you're little Mary McMurray—Oh rats! You don't understand a word I'm saying!"

But she did know a few words, *senhores*. She smiled brightly and said:

"Baby Mary! Mary wants horsie."

"I reckon you can have several horsies," laughed the Tucandeira. "And you're going to live out in the big country where the horsies grow, too. You'd perish in a city, surrounded by a lot of jealous, supercilious cats."

"Then you are not going to poke into the other rivers along the Amazon and seek trouble there, *senhor?*" asked Pedro.

"Nope. Not now. I fancy I've found trouble enough to keep me busy for a while. I've got to teach my Mary girl how to talk and eat with a fork and wear clothes and ride horsies and—and everything. Yep, your old pal the Tucandeira has bitten off a man-sized mouthful, I'll say. *Coronel*, how soon can we catch the bally boat for the States?"

"I NEVER let sentiment interfere with business."

It was the fat man in the seat ahead, heavily gold-chained as to chest and diamonded as to finger, who had said it pompously and oracularly to his chinless companion of the side-whiskers The methodical Sam Thorne didn't know either of them, wasn't interested in either and didn't hear the chinless one's rejoinder, which he assumed was duly accordant. Yet that trite and callous bit of philosophy was running in his head when he left the train at Lyndholm.

Huh! He didn't believe it could be done,

even by fat men of oppressive prosperity. It took him two looks at his watch to get the time, for there was passing through his mind a long-forgotten something from his school-reader days, something about mercy's seasoning justice. He couldn't recall the exact words but had the general idea.

"Bully line!" he commented, to himself—thereby unconsciously giving Mr. Shakespeare as sincere a tribute of appreciation as had been extended to him in three hundred years.

The time was 12:37 P. M., and the methodical Mr. Thorne jotted the fact down in a little note-book under a date in June.

Although this was his first visit, he felt that he knew the place. The town looked to him like a hundred other towns of the Middle West. The uncut weeds along the tracks, the squatty station with the round red water-tank at one end, the boy with the mail-sack, the agent with the yellow train-order, the old woman with the plethoric telescope, the crates of live poultry and the truck-load of dressed veal, nobody's dog wisely scrutinizing the arrivals—none of these presented anything new to Sam Thorne, special agent of the Bankers' Protective Bureau.

He gave his bag to the whiskered, short-sleeved, cap-labeled push-cart man—a village elder who "called" for the Commercial House—flicked the dust off his trousers, straightened his sport shirt and sauntered up-town.

While Mr. Thorne is walking plump into the story, it may be well to state that a "special agent" such as he, is a sublimated detective, one become so expert that he has acquired professional standing and has given up general, all-round, catch-as-catch-can sleuthing for fancy specialty-sleuthing for a firm or organization.

Mr. Thorne's specialty was protecting banks, more particularly client banks, from the depredations of yeggmen, forgers and other enemies of financial institutions. His activities were engaged more in prevention than in capture for so long as the crook gentry confined their efforts to post-offices, stores and private residences, he felt that he was doing his work reasonably well.

As he left the station he was not in the best of humor. It wasn't that the day was sticky-hot or that he disliked having to work under such conditions, but he didn't enjoy the assignment that had sent him to Lyndholm.

The president of a chain of country banks had asked his bureau, a private agency, to send a man to Lyndholm on a "still hunt." The man was to sound its people as to the prevailing sentiment toward the cashier of the bank there, one of the chain.

This cashier, who had held the position for more than twenty years, was suspected by a new group controlling the chain to be too slow for modern business, "honest and all that, of course, but not up and doing."

Thorne had been chosen as the shrewdest and most tactful man the bureau had.

Despite this evidence of distinction, he was a little sore. He considered himself a crime-specialist, not an investigator of respectable "has-beens." Also, he felt sorry for the cashier, if he were slipping—a state of mind popularly supposed to be foreign to members of his craft who may feel admiration but not sympathy for their quarry.

Thorne, having lunched in the diner, resisted the attraction of the Hungry Hour short-order restaurant, but stopped in front of the next building, for its lettered window bore the legend that the Poplar County *Trumpet* was housed therein, Will Lowe, publisher.

Could it be the Will Lowe he had known years before as a reporter in the capital? He hoped so. Lowe had a head and could keep his mouth shut.

"Why Sam Thorne, you bolt from heaven!"

A voice greeted him as he stepped inside, and the Lowe he had known got up from his chair, both hands outstretched.

"You rainbow in a murky sky, never was anybody gladder to see you than I am," said Lowe. "What brings you here? Have my sins found me out?"

"I came down to visit the editor of the only newspaper in Lyndholm," Thorne joshed, grinning. "Want to know how the weekly publishing-business is going."

Lowe had just returned from lunch at the Hungry Hour. The two sat down and, after a little reminiscing, Thorne explained his mission, "on the quiet, of course."

"That's Melgaard's bank across the street," Lowe pointed out as the story unfolded.

ALMOST at the very minute that Sam Thorne got off the Chicago express, Mrs. Jens Melgaard at her front door eight blocks from the bank was kissing her little daughter good-by and sending her proudly down the steps and away with a basket.

As Tillie set out, there wasn't a happier little girl in Lyndholm. There wasn't a prettier little girl there, nor a daintier; nor at that particular moment was there one with more sense of importance, for in that basket under the spread-out napkin, wrapped in tissue-paper, was her daddy's lunch.

It was a good way to daddy's bank and Tillie made much of that walk, swaggering just a little, it must be admitted, when she passed certain houses where folks were likely to be looking out and might see her.

It was too hot for any one to be outside unless engaged in some mission of high emprise, such as carrying lunch to the best daddy in the world.

Hot! What could be hotter than Lyndholm in the noon-hour of a June day? The sun blazed lazily in at open doors and windows, crinkled the leaves on the trees, and made the cement walks hot enough to bake cakes on. It invited to lingering in shady places.

The heat had caused a let-down in the business of the village. People were at dinner pretty largely. Stores were all but deserted, with the younger help holding down until the boss should return.

Who in Lyndholm ever thought of shopping in the noon-hour or doing any other work then —except the hotel man or the doctor, the one inviting patronage at that hour and the other not always being able to prevent it.

Not a soul was to be seen in Main Street. A farmer's team stood, heads down, in front of the Commercial House, with Joe Rahn's collie drowsing under the wagon. Even the flies in the store windows seemed lethargic.

But Tillie did not think of the heat. Though her little nose shone with wholesome moisture, though her basket grew heavier and heavier, these things did not bother her. Was she not getting nearer to the bank with every step, and would she not receive there the best kind of welcome from the man who surely was the greatest man in Lyndholm and who ranked, in her eyes, right along with the President for greatness?

When Tillie stepped into the open door of the Farmers' State Bank, the fact that no one was in the front quarters did not disturb her. She had often seen the bank that way, during business-hours too, when her daddy was in the vault or the directors' room at the back.

He ran the bank without help, for its business was small, and as for guarding things—well, Lyndholm was a neighborly town and among neighbors one need not always keep the candle-sticks under lock and key.

Tillie walked confidently in and let her basket fall to the floor with a thud of relief. It was heavy. She did admit it to herself now that she had arrived. At first she thought she would call. Then the gleeful purpose came to her to surprize her daddy, and on tiptoe she moved toward the half-opened door of the directors' room. She had noticed that the vault door was closed.

Not a sound came from the directors' room. Daddy must be so busy with his old papers and things that he had forgotten all about his lunch. He often forgot like that when he was too busy to lock up and come home in the middle of the day.

Tillie couldn't understand how any one—but if it was her daddy, it was all right. He had said before leaving home that morning that he had a lot of letters to write, and Tillie's mama had just taken it for granted he wouldn't come home and had sent Tillie without even calling daddy on the telephone.

Her face beaming with anticipation, Tillie took the first two steps toward that half-opened door. They went readily. The third step was taken before Tillie realized that something was not quite as it should be. At the fourth, she knew she was afraid, but she didn't know why. She tried the fifth, but her foot stopped in the air. It came down as if numbed, right in the same place, and then Tillie's knees began to tremble and she was scared all over.

She turned and ran screaming into the street.

Lowe and Thorne went to her relief. She could tell them nothing more than that she was afraid of something in the bank. They hurried into the building.

The bank seemed the same as usual inside—for its barred enclosure was the same, and its little windows with their marble shelving were the same, and its wall-desk to the fore with pens, ink, blotters, deposit-slips and non-negotiable check-blanks was the same. The bank was not the same inside, for all that.

THEY found the body lying face up on the floor of the directors' room, with a bullet-wound in the head. Jens Melgaard was dead.

In a few minutes half the town, led by the town marshal, trooped into the bank. Tillie, left sobbing in the street, was gathered in by the milliner, who took her to her mother.

After the doctor had given his opinion that the cashier had probably died instantly and most likely within the hour, "Stubble" Hinds, the marshal, was foremost in conversation and conjecture.

Mr. Hinds' nickname had been conferred because of a certain neglect in care of his person. It was reputed he did most of his thinking with the wrong part of his head, and it was hinted in that connection that he had taken too much to heart the story of Samson and Delilah.

"Jens has been shot," declared Stubble to a roomful, impressively. "Who shot him? Was he murdered? If he shot himself, was it an accident?"

After this masterly analysis of the possibilities, he paused for replies.

"Where's the revolver?" asked Will Lowe.

Stubble hadn't thought of that. Where indeed? It wasn't found in a search of the room, in the main quarters or outside.

"That about settles it for me," said the marshal. "It looked like murder when I first saw him. Now I'm about sure it was. Just wait till I catch——"

The whole village "laid off" for the afternoon in reacting to the news of Jens Melgaard's death. Groups gathered in the post-office, the drug-store, the barber-shop, and the saloon, discussing it in subdued voices.

On his arrival from the county-seat after a record automobile-trip, the coroner declared

that from the nature of the wound it might have been murder or suicide, but hardly accident. At the inquest late in the day the jury, with a conservatism consistent with its lack of information, reported a verdict of death due to a bullet-wound "inflicted by some person or persons unknown."

The State banking-department sent an auditor on the afternoon train which ordinarily did not stop in Lyndholm. With him came a representative of the headquarters of the bank-chain. A cursory examination was made of the bank's books, cash and vault-contents. It disclosed nothing wrong.

Six hundred dollars in currency had been exposed in the cage when the body was found, and the door to the cage was open. If Melgaard had been murdered for the bank's cash, the murderer had been frightened away without getting any of it. No note of explanation was found. The cashier's desk papers told nothing. No one seemed to know whether Melgaard had kept a revolver in the bank.

As Jens Melgaard had been without known enemies, a theory of malice or revenge was untenable. His life had been somewhat dull and colorless without highlights, that of a staid, reserved, decorous country banker.

He had lived in Lyndholm nearly thirty of his fifty years, had never been mixed up in anything questionable and had divided his time between his business and his family. He had married when past forty and Tillie was the only child. There was no history of grudges, of bad feeling over mortgages foreclosed or loans refused.

According to Mrs. Melgaard there had been no trouble between her and her husband. She would not listen to the possibility of suicide. It was murder, she held, but she had no helpful suggestion.

Sam Thorne was finding Lyndholm interesting after all. Though his assignment had petered out, his nerves were tingling with the zest of a mystery after his own heart.

"I happen to know," Lowe told him on the side, "that Melgaard had been considerably worried in the last few months over the thing that sent you here. He had spoken to me about it—said I was the only one in town he was mentioning it to. Never was very talkative about anything, but he felt his job was in jeopardy and just had to spill to somebody. To lose the job or be demoted after all these years was unthinkable to him. That might point to suicide but for the missing gun."

The industrious Stubble joined them. He had learned who Thorne was, but accepted without suspicion the explanation that Thorne had come down merely to spend a day with his old friend. That the detective might have come on a professional mission never entered Mr. Hinds' mind.

"Me and the sheriff have been checking up the town," he said. "The sheriff drove in an hour ago, you know. He's new at this business, only elected last Fall, but he's a keen one. We've learned that no strangers were seen in town today before Number Five came in. Mr. Thorne was the only one to get off Number Five, but of course we don't suspect you. Ha, ha, ha!

"Yet the whole town thinks it was murder, or the gun would have been found with the body. I'm about sure it was, myself. You see the outside window of the directors' room was closed when Jens was found. It hasn't any marks, pane or sill, inside or out. Dust wasn't disturbed on the outside sill at all.

"The murderer must have gone in and left by the front door—playing in great luck, I'll say."

Mr. Hinds conceded without the question having been raised that such things were possible without any one's notice in the noon-hour in Lyndholm.

Thorne had looked on in the first examination of the body before its removal. He had seen nothing suggestive of a clue, but had not overlooked a faint spot of red on the inner side of the right shirtsleeve above the elbow. Melgaard had died with his coat off. He had worn habitually white, stiff-bosomed shirts to business, patterns never having appealed to him. He was an old-fashioned type.

As for the red, it was not a blood-stain. It was not deep enough in color for that, and it stood up on the surface instead of being absorbed in the fabric. It was such a blur as the dust of a red pencil might have made. Thorne had said nothing about the red mark, as the others hadn't mentioned it. In his own mind it did not seem especially significant.

After a walk around the village, Thorne went back to the bank to take another look at its interior arrangement. In the space outside the wire enclosure a telephone stood at one end of a wall-desk. It was the only telephone in the bank, placed there as an accommodation to patrons as well as for the cashier's use. Thorne stepped up to it to call the station agent and ask about a train-schedule.

As he reached for the receiver, he saw something that caused him to hesitate. He did not telephone. At the base of the instrument were several fresh pencil-shavings, and on the green blotter on which it rested was a blotch, as of a thumb, in red.

He made for the drug-store, where he asked for a red pencil.

"Much demand for these?" he inquired casually.

"Not much," the clerk replied. "Only three or four persons in town ever want them."

Thorne looked a mild interest. He said he supposed the newspaper-editor was one and the school-principal another.

"Right," said the clerk. "And a checker at the mill, and—this is rather queer too—Jerry O'Toole, the saloon-keeper. Jerry uses up more red pencils than the rest of them put together. Always has one or two in his pocket. Does all his figuring with red pencils."

The next call obviously should be at the telephone-exchange. Taking chances was quite within Thorne's logic. One never knows what may turn up.

"Is your board very busy at noon?" he asked Miss Tessie Bertleson, switchboard-goddess of the day-shift, after the usual preliminaries to getting acquainted.

Miss Bertleson, who was not at all averse to talking with strangers, laughed. It was not. Sometimes she ate her lunch without having a single plug to make.

"Can you tell how many calls you had in the noon-hour today, for instance?" he asked, as if merely testing her memory.

"Easy," replied the accommodating and accomplished Miss Bertleson. "There was one from Mr. Palmquist, the minister. He talked with Mrs. Norden, the president of the church missionary society. And one from Mrs. Huntley, the lawyer's wife. She asked for the time. And one from Jerry O'Toole, the saloon-keeper. He called for the ice-house. Couldn't get anybody there, though. Then the marshal called to get the sheriff on the long-distance. You know the banker was shot here this morning? Of course, after the body was found there were a lot of calls."

So a habitual user of red pencils had been among those noon telephoners. Thorne's next question was studiously conversational.

"Do you happen to remember where O'Toole phoned from?"

"Sure," came back the efficient Miss Bertleson. "We keep track of lots of such things. It's dull here most of the time, you see, so I and the night girl often follow details like that, conversations and so on. O'Toole has no phone of his own and generally uses the one in the bank. It's only two doors away. He called a little before 12:30 P.M. I remember because he broke his pencil figuring what he owed the iceman while waiting for his connection and he asked me to keep on trying to raise some one while he sharpened it."

Miss Bertleson stopped suddenly, so suddenly that she nearly lost her gum. Her eyes widened and her mouth remained open in a scared sort of way.

"Say," she gasped. "He musta been in the bank about the time that happened!"

"Don't say a word about this until I see you again," Thorne cautioned her, displaying a police star that had a belladonna effect on Miss Bertleson's startled eyes.

"Not a word out of me," assured the girl. "I can keep my mouth shut if I have to."

IT WAS about time to have a look at this Jerry O'Toole. Thorne found it hard to keep from hurrying to the saloon, yet he didn't want to appear to be in haste. As it wasn't time for the before-supper imbibers, O'Toole was alone at the bar when Thorne entered and called for a libation as a move toward good relations.

O'Toole was hard-boiled and seasoned. He had been a floater for fifteen years before bumping into a snag in Lyndholm in the shape of a woman and, swinging with the current, had stuck there. Whatever of a man he was—and he laid no claim to being much of one—Mrs. O'Toole had made him.

He was a short, stout as to middle, scraggly-mustached, fish-eyed promoter of evil, who had been mixed up in much iniquity, both commonplace and strange. He had been in tight places more than once, had fought all kinds of men, licked some and been licked by others. He was afraid of nothing. If he had ever had any illusions, he had lost them. Folks called his place "The Sewer," which told the story.

Perhaps his wife had never seen in him anything more than a living, for she was a devout church-member and had dinned into his ears for twenty years a plea that he go into something respectable. She may have married him to reform him.

But Jerry O'Toole was not the reforming kind. The church did not appeal to him, although he respected his wife's belief in it. All the relief-bodies in the town had him on their blacklists. He had never been known to give a nickel to church-benefit, for the poor or for missions. They agreed that he had no more sentiment than a turtle.

On the subject of the bank-mystery which Thorne broached, O'Toole was conversational as befitted a host, but not contributive. He had no suggestions as to solution.

"How far is it to Whipple and what is the best route?" asked Thorne, changing the subject. "I'm thinking of driving there."

"You go west three miles on the Dodd road," O'Toole explained, "then north five, following the railroad most of the way."

He reached for a pad of paper on the cigar-case on which to trace the route, pulling a pencil from a vest pocket. It was a red pencil. As luck or fate would have it, the pencil was worn to the wood and O'Toole sharpened it.

Thorne noticed two enlightening things: O'Toole was left-handed, and he held the pencil with the point toward him while sharpening, in the manner that used to bring the comment, "like a girl," but which is no longer an accurate description, if it ever was.

The result was that the red scrapings got on his left thumb, the thumb of the hand holding the knife. When he was through, he wiped the thumb twice against his fresh white apron,

leaving two slight splotches of red near the left hip.

The two were alone. As O'Toole closed the knife and put it back in his pocket, Thorne asked in an every-day voice—

"O'Toole, why did you take that gun?"

Jerry O'Toole had a good grip on himself. He showed no surprize, but looked the other calmly in the eye, countering with a suggestion of challenge—

"What're you givin' us?"

"O'Toole," said Thorne, "you have a habit of using a red pencil. Only three other men in town have such a habit. You sharpen it with the point toward you, with the knife in your left hand, and you get the scrapings on your left thumb. You wipe the thumb on your apron. It leaves a mark.

"There was just such a mark on Melgaard's white shirt, on the right sleeve and on the inner side above the elbow. It was such a mark as a man might have made with his left thumb if it had red pencil-dust on it and he was stooping over the body, feeling with the other hand for the heart.

"Red pencil-scrapings were on the desk on which the bank phone stands when I was there an hour ago. Some one had sharpened a red pencil there. You were in the bank today at the noon-hour—when Melgaard was killed. You used the phone to order some ice. Also, you sharpened your pencil while at the desk.

"Now you've kept quiet about having been there at all. It seems you didn't tell the marshal or the coroner or any one else. You have too much sense to have killed Melgaard after using his phone, or to have used it before killing him if you had meant to do it. You didn't kill him, but you did take the gun and you know a lot more about the whole affair than you've ever told. Why did you take it and what do you know?"

As Thorne had said, O'Toole was a man of sense. He returned the other's gaze stolidly before he spoke.

"You've doped it out about right," he said. "I didn't kill him. You can make it hot for me if you want to. I knew things would look against me if I were found out—knew that when I took the gun."

He called to a man washing windows outside.

"Mind the bar, Jim," he directed.

He led Thorne into the back room. The two sat at a little table, but they did not take anything.

"MY WIFE and Mrs. Melgaard are sisters," O'Toole began.

Thorne shot a quick look at the somber barkeeper. So that was the connection.

"They go to the same church," O'Toole went on, "the church 'most everybody goes to here and all the country around. It means a lot to my wife, and Mrs. Melgaard, too, I suppose. Their father was a strong church-member.

"Six months ago old Lars Bjorkman, the harness-maker, killed himself. He had belonged to that church, and so had his wife and children. It seems the church is strict against suicides—won't let such as kills themselves be buried with a church-funeral or in its cemetery. They passed Lars up. It went hard with his folks—nearly killed his wife."

O'Toole was looking past Thorne at a picture on the wall showing Pan disporting with his nymphs.

"Melgaard killed himself," he continued. "The gun was in his hand when I found him, and he was dead. I had phoned—use his phone almost every day, as I haven't any here—and then I walked back to say 'hello' to Jens."

Thorne, his face imperturbable, tapped a cigaret on the table, and then did a thing that caused the blood to rise in Jerry O'Toole's florid face—he passed the case to him. But O'Toole ignored it.

"Dead men don't bother me as they do most people," he kept on. "I've seen too many of them. When I saw the body there, it came to me what it would mean to his wife and the little girl. Prettiest girl in town, Tillie is. I've none of my own, but if I had any I'd like them to be just like her.

"I could see the Bjorkman case all over again. So I just put that gun in my pocket and went away. I knew I was taking a chance with the telephone-girl. No one was in at the ice-house, or I wouldn't have risked it. The gun is in the safe there."

Thorne had not interrupted. O'Toole got up, peered into the bar to see if any customers were about, and beckoned Thorne to the safe. He showed him a revolver with a strong smell as of having been recently fired.

"It's a .32," he said. "That's the size of bullet they found. I know who you are. I knew you the minute you came in. Remembered you from the Rockford bank case in the nineties. Now you can do what you want to."

The detective knew men and he was willing to take big chances, at times, in judging them. He reached out and shook the hand of the astonished O'Toole.

"You did the right thing," he said, "and—you have a heart. Now say nothing, and we'll try to keep this dark."

Thorne went out, thinking of the telephone-girl. He wondered whether he could win from her a pledge of secrecy by telling her the whole story and putting O'Toole's fate and the widow's future peace of mind into her hands. He felt she had a heart, too.

Turning a corner on his way back to the exchange, he met the town marshal.

"Well," inquired that official in the familiar

tone that should characterize professional brothers, "what do you make of it? Looks more an' more like a murder to me. The fellow who did it got cold feet and lit out."

Thorne did not reply at once.

The funeral had been set for the day after the next. Lowe's paper would be issued a day early to get the news to the countryside. Business-places would be closed that day, the schools would be closed, folk for miles around would come in for the funeral. Services would be conducted in the big church. There would be a long procession to the cemetery. Jens Melgaard's body would be laid to rest with the respect of the community that had known him and looked up to him for a generation. His widow would have that much consolation, at least.

"Yes," Thorne agreed, to the satisfaction of the expectant Stubble, who was eying him almost wistfully. "It surely looks like murder to me, too."

Thorne stopped to tell Lowe the outcome on his way to persuade the gossipy Miss Bertleson.

WHEN he had left, the editor sat at his desk for some time, thinking. He knew now the kind of story he would write for the edition the next day, but it wouldn't be the real story. He longed to put up that one.

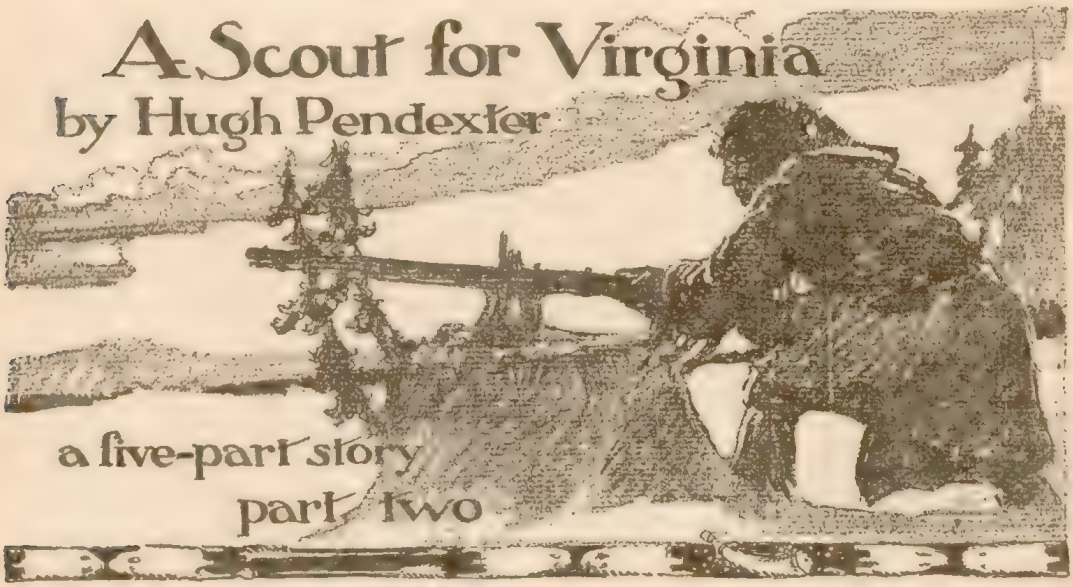
So there was another side to Jerry O'Toole—and it had taken all these years to crop out. Thorne too, was a good scout. Here he was playing the game for this woman, a stranger, and her little girl. And as for Tessie Bertleson—well, Lowe felt strangely sure of her, as well.

Pasted on the wall above his desk was a passage from a favorite author, one that had helped him in his understanding of life in the big city and in the small town—

Within the most starched cravat there passes a windpipe and a weasand, and under the thickliest embroidered waistcoat beats a heart.

The lady of the wall-calendar next this wise saw smiled down at him. He smiled back.

"Yes—and under a bartender's apron, a sport shirt, and a telephone chest-piece," he supplemented, for her benefit.



Author of "Red Belts," "Kings of the Missouri," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

IN 1774 the Virginians, having given up all hope for a friendly penetration and settlement of the lands beyond the western frontier, were making preparations for the ensuing struggle. War was the inevitable outcome of the contest between two alien races, each determined on the same prize and each made bitter by the memories of fearful wrongs.

For the Indians were not alone in committing outrages. A certain element among the backwoodsmen, often men who had suffered cruelly at the hands of the Indians, made it a practise to wipe out all redskins with whom they came in contact, whether friendly or otherwise. And in revenge the Indians were not always particular in their choice of white victims.

I, Basdell Morris, messenger between the commandant at Fort Pitt and his lordship the Earl of Dunmore, royal governor of Virginia, was resting at noon at the junction of the Monongahela and the Cheat, when I saw an Indian floating down the

river in a canoe. Recognizing him as Bald Eagle, a friendly Delaware, I hailed him. Simultaneously with my hail I heard a shot followed by a panther-scream, and Shelby Cousin, an Indian-hater, emerged from the bushes. But his shot was wasted, for Bald Eagle had already been killed by some other Indian-hater who had set him adrift as a ghastly joke. I spoke to Cousin about his attacks on friendly Indians and told him what would happen if the peaceful Delawares should be driven into joining the hostile Shawnee and Mingo bands.

"A redskin," Cousin retorted, "is a wild animal. When I was a boy I came home from squirrel-shooting, and there I found my father and mother sculped and my little sister stolen. How would you feel?"

Leaving Cousin, I proceeded to Howard's Creek, where all the people from the surrounding countryside were busy erecting a fort. There Isaac Crabtree killed the Indian, Cherokee Billy for no reason. The murder pleased the younger whites; but the older men looked grave, for the brother of the dead Indian was Oconostota, the powerful chief of the friendly Cherokees.

From here I hurried toward Salem to see Patricia Dale, whom I had not laid eyes on for three years. Now and then a burned cabin, and at night a glare against the sky, indicated the tragedies of those desperate times. The Grisdols' cabin was only a little way off my trace; so I turned aside to warn them against the Indians. At some distance in the woods I saw the form of a bear; and, suspicious at the calm behavior of my horse, I dismounted and stalked the animal. As I drew near, the bear stood up, revealing a Shawnee warrior. I shot him and took from his belt four fresh scalps. The Grisdols needed no warning.

Cousin, attracted by the sound of my shot, unexpectedly appeared and reported Black Hoof and his Shawnee braves on my trail. Together we hastened to the half-burned Grisdol cabin, where we prepared to defend ourselves. The cries of the Indians closing in on us suddenly ceased as the petulant voice of a man called out, and "Baby" Kirst appeared in the clearing. Kirst, a giant in strength but a child mentally, was feared by the red men. They suffered him to go unharmed, believing him to be under the protection of the Great Spirit. At his arrival they fled; and, the danger being over, I parted from Cousin and resumed my journey.

As I neared Salem I fell in with one John Ward, who as a child had been captured by the Indians and was but now making his escape from Black Hoof. I hoped that he might give me some word concerning the fate of Cousin's sister, but to my disappointment he knew nothing about her. I left him at Salem, duty overcoming my keen desire to stay there, and went on to Richfield, where I reported and delivered my dispatches to Governor Dunmore and Colonel Lewis.

CHAPTER V

LOVE COMES A CROPPER

"I AM speaking of a war with England." These words of Colonel Lewis rang in my ears as I rode to Salem. They had sounded fantastic when he uttered them. Now that I was alone they repeated themselves most ominously. The flying hoofs of my horse pounded them into my ears. War with England was unthinkable, and yet the colonel's speech lifted me up to a dreary height and I was gazing over into a new and very grim world.

For years, from my first connected thoughts, there had been dissension after dissension between England and America. My father before me had lived through similar disputes. But why talk of war now? Many times the colonies had boiled over a bit; then some concession was made, and what our orators had declared to be a crisis died out and became a dead issue.

To be sure another "crisis" always took the place of the defunct one, but the great fact remained that none of those situations had led to war. Perhaps if some one other than Colonel Lewis had indulged in the dire foreboding it would have made less of an impression. At the time he spoke the words I had not been disturbed. Now that I was remembering what an unemotional level-headed man he was the effect became accumulative. The farther I left Richfield behind and the longer I mulled over his sinister statement the more I worried.

As I neared Salem my meditations continued disquieting and yet were highly pleasing. I was on my way to meet Patricia Dale. I was born on the Mattapony and left an orphan at an early age. I had gone to Williamsburg when turning sixteen, and soon learned to love and wear gold and silver buckles on a pewter income.

In my innocence, rather ignorance, I unwittingly allowed my town acquaintances to believe me to be a chap of means. When I discovered their false estimate I did not have the courage to disillusion them. My true spending-pace was struck on my eighteenth birthday, and inside the year I had wasted my King William County patrimony.

Just what process of reasoning I followed during that foolish year I have never been able to determine. I must have believed it to be imperative that I live up to the expectations of my new friends. As a complement to this idiotic obsession there must have been a grotesque belief that somehow, by accident or miracle, I would be kept in funds indefinitely.

I do recall my amazement at the abrupt ending of my dreams. I woke up one morning to discover I had no money, no assets. There were no odds and ends, even, of wreckage which I could salvage for one more week of the old life.

Among my first friends had been Ericus Dale and his daughter, Patricia. To her intimates she was known as Patsy. As was to be expected when an awkward boy meets a dainty and wonderful maid I fell in love completely out of sight. At nineteen I observed that the

girl, eighteen, was becoming a toast among men much older and very, very much more sophisticated than I.

She was often spoken of as the belle of Charles City County, and I spent much time vainly wishing she was less attractive. Her father, engaged in the Indian-trade, and often away from home for several months at a time, had seemed to be very kindly disposed to me.

I instinctively hurried to the Dales to impart the astounding fact that I was bankrupt. One usually speaks of financial reverses as "crashing about" one's head. My wind-up did not even possess that poor dignity; for there was not enough left even to rattle, let alone crash.

The youth who rode so desperately to the Dale home that wonderful day tragically to proclaim his plight, followed by fervid vows to go away and make a new fortune, has long since won my sympathy. I have always resented Ericus Dale's attitude toward that youth on learning he was a pauper. It is bad enough to confess to a girl that one has not enough to marry on; but it is hell to be compelled to add that one has not enough to woo on.

How it wrung my heart to tell her I was an imposter, that I was going to the back-country and begin life all over. Poor young devil! How many like me have solemnly declared their intentions to begin all over, whereas, in fact, they never had begun at all.

And why does youth in such juvenile cataclysms feel forced to seek new fields in making the fresh start? Shame for having failed, I suppose. An unwillingness to toe the scratch under the handicap of having his neighbors know it is his second trial.

But so much had happened since that epochal day back in Williamsburg that it seemed our parting had been fully a million years ago. It made me smile to remember how mature Patsy had been when I meekly ran her errands and gladly wore her yoke in the old days.

Three years of surveying, scouting and dispatch-bearing through the trackless wilderness had aged me. I prided myself I was an old man in worldly wisdom. Patsy Dale had only added three years to her young life. I could even feel much at ease in meeting Ericus Dale. And yet there had been no day during my absence that I did not think of her, still idealizing her, and finding her fragrant memory an anodyne when suffering in the wilderness.

The sun was casting its longest shadows as I inquired for the house and rode to it. If my heart went pit-a-pat when I dismounted and walked to the veranda it must have been because of anticipation. As I was about to rap on the casing of the open door I heard a deep voice exclaim:

"This country's going to the dogs! We need the regulars over here. Using volunteers weakens a country. Volunteers are too —— independent. They'll soon get the notion they're running things over here. ——. Put me in charge of Virginia, and I'd make some changes. I'd begin with Dunmore and wind up with the backwoodsmen. Neither Whigs nor Tories can save this country. It's trade we want, trade with the Indians."

I could not hear that any one was answering him, and after a decent interval I rapped again. At last I heard a slow, heavy step approaching from the cool twilight of the living-room.

"Aye? You have business with me, my man?" demanded Dale, staring into my face without appearing to recognize me. He had changed none that I could perceive. Short, square as though chopped out of an oak log. His dark hair still kinked a bit and suggested great virility. His thick lips were pursed as of old, and the bushy brows, projecting nearly an inch from the deep-set eyes, perhaps had a bit more gray in them than they showed three years back.

"Ericus Dale, you naturally have forgotten me," I began. "I am Basdel Morris. I knew you and your daughter three years ago in Williamsburg."

"Oh, young Morris, eh? I'm better at remembering Indian faces than white. Among 'em so much. So you're young Morris, who made a fool of himself trying to be gentry. Sit down. Turned to forest-running, I should say." And he advanced to the edge of the veranda and seated himself. He had not bothered to shake hands.

"I had business with Colonel Lewis and I wished to see you and Patsy before going back," I explained. I had looked for bluntness in his greeting, but I had expected to be invited inside the house.

"Pat's out," he mumbled, his keen gaze roaming up and down my forest garb. "But she'll be back. Morris, you don't seem to have made a —— of a hit at prosperity since coming out this way."

"I'm dependent only on myself," I told him. "Personal appearance doesn't go for much when you're in the woods."

"Ain't it the truth?" he agreed. "In trade?"

"Carrying dispatches between Fort Pitt and Governor Dunmore just now. Surveying before that."

"Then, by Harry, sir! You could be in better business," he snapped. "What with Dunmore at the top, and thieving, land-grabbing settlers at the bottom, this country is going to the devil! Dunmore cooks up a war to make a profit out of his land-jobbing! Settlers quit good lands on this side the mountains to go land-stealing in the Kentucky country and north of the Ohio. It riles my blood! I say you could be in better business than helping along the schemes of Dunmore and that trained skunk of his, Jack Connolly."

I SMILED pleasantly, beginning to remember that Ericus Dale was always a freely spoken man.

"Do you mean that there is no need of this war? You say it is cooked up."

"Need of war?" he wrathfully repeated. "In God's mercy why should we have war with the Indians? All they ask is to be let alone! Ever see a single piaster of profit made out of a dead Indian unless you could sell his hair? Of course not. The Indians don't want war. What they want is trade. I've lived among 'em. I know. It's Dunmore and the border scum who want war. They want to steal more land."

I had no wish to quarrel with the man, but I, too, had been among the Indians; and I could not in decency to myself allow his ridiculous statements to go unchallenged.

"How can the country expand unless the settlers have land? And if the Indians block the trail how can we get the land without fighting for it? Surely it was never intended that five or more square miles of the fairest country on earth should be devoted to keeping alive one naked red hunter."

He fairly roared in disgust. Then with an effort to be calm he began:

"Land? Settlers? You can't build a profit on land and settlers. Why, the colonies already refuse to pay any revenue to England. Line both sides of the Ohio with log cabins and stick a white family in each and what good does it do? Did the French try to settle Canada? No! The French weren't fools. They depended on trade."

"But they lost Canada," I reminded.

"Bah! For a purely military reason. The future of this country is trade. England's greatness is built up on trade." His trick of jumping his voice on that word "trade" was very offensive to the ears.

"Pennsylvania has the right idea. Pennsylvania is prosperous. Pennsylvania doesn't go round chopping down bee-trees and then killing the bees to get the honey. What good is this land over here if you can't get fur from it? Settlers chop down the timber, burn it, raise measly patches of corn, live half-starved, die. That's all."

His crazy tirade nettled me. It was obvious I could not keep in his good books, even with Patricia as the incentive, without losing my self-respect. I told him:

"This country can never develop without settled homes. We're building rudely now, but a hundred years from now——"

"Yah!" And his disgust burst through the thick lips in a deep howl. "Who of us will be alive a hundred years from now? Were we put on earth to slave and make fortunes for fools not yet born? Did any fools work and save up so we could take life soft and easy? You make me sick!"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Dale, to hear you say that However, the war is here——"

"The war may be here, in Virginia, among the backwoodsmen. It is also in Dunmore's heart, but it ain't in the hearts of the Indians," he passionately contradicted. "The Indians only ask to be let alone, to be allowed to trade with us. Some canting hypocrites are whining for us to civilize the Indians. Why should they be civilized? Do they want to be? Ever hear of Indians making a profit out of our civilization? Did the Canestoga Indians make a profit when they tried to live like the whites near Lancaster, and the Paxton boys killed fourteen of them, men, women and children, then broke into the Lancaster jail where the others had been placed for their safety, and butchered the rest of them?

"Did the ancient Virginia Indians prosper by civilization? I reckon if the old Powhatans could return they'd have some mighty warm things to say on that score. Why shouldn't the Indians insist we live as they do? They were here first. The only way to help the Indians is to trade with them. And when you help him that way you're helping yourself. That's the only point you can ever make a red man see.

"I know the Indians. I can go into their towns now, be they Cherokee, Mingo, Shawnee or Delaware, and they'll welcome me as a brother. They know I don't want their land. They know I'm their true friend. They want me to make a profit when I trade with them, so I'll come again with more rum and blankets and guns, and gay cloth for their women."

"You have the trader's point of view, and very naturally so," I said.

"Thank God I ain't got the land-grabber's point of view! Nor the canting hypocrite's point of view! Nor a thick-headed forest-runner's point of view!" he loudly stormed, rising to end the discussion.

But I was not to be balked, and I reminded him:

"I called to pay my respects to Mistress Dale. I hope I may have the pleasure."

"She's in the field back of the house. I'll call her," he grumbled. "I have a man in my kitchen, a white man, who has lived with the Indians ever since he was a boy. He knows more about them than all you border-folks could learn in a million years. He's the most sensible white man I ever met. He agrees with me perfectly that trade is what the Indian wants; not settlers nor Bibles."

"Your guest would be John Ward!" I exclaimed, remembering the governor's errand. "I was asked by Colonel Lewis to find him and send him to Richfield. The colonel and Governor Dunmore wish to talk with him."

"Ho! Ho! That's the way the cat jumps, eh? Want to milk him for military information

eh? Well, I reckon I'll go along with him and see they don't play no tricks on him. I've taken a strong liking to Ward. He's the one white man that's got my point of view."

"He lived with the Indians so long he may have the Indians' point of view," I warned.

"The sooner white men learn the Indians' point of view the better it'll be for both white and red. Ward knows the Indians well enough to know I'm their friend. He knows I'm more'n welcome in any of their towns. I'm going to carry a talk to Cornstalk and Black Hoof. If I can't stop this war I can fix it so's there'll never be any doubt who's to blame for it."

"I tell you, Dale, that no white men, except it be Ward or Tavenor Ross and others like them, are safe for a minute with Logan's Cayugas, Cornstalk's Shawnees, Red Hawk's Delawares, or Chiyawee's Wyandots."

"Three years ain't even made a tomahawk improvement on you," he sneered. "—— boy! You mean to tell me that after all my years of friendship with the Indians I won't be safe among them, or that any friends I take along won't be safe among them? You talk worse'n a fool! I can send my girl *alone* into the Scioto villages, and once she gives belts from me she will be as safe as she would be in Williamsburg or Norfolk."

"Such talk is madness," I cried. "The one message your cousin, Patrick Davis's wife, on Howard's Creek, asked me to deliver to your daughter is for her not to cross the mountains until the Indian trouble is over."

"An old biddy whose husband is scared at every Indian he sees because he knows he's squatting on their lands. My cousin may not be safe on Howard's Creek, but my daughter would be. I'll say more; once the Indians know I am at Howard's Creek, they'll spare that settlement."

It was useless to argue with the man. It was almost impossible to believe that he meant his vaporings for seriousness. With a scowl he walked to the rear of the house and entered the kitchen. All the windows were open, and his voice was deep and heavy. I heard him say:

"Ward, I want you. We're going to have a talk with two white men, who don't understand Indians. Pat, that —— young cub of a forest-running Morris is out front. Hankers to see you, I 'low."

MY leather face was still on fire when I heard the soft swish of skirts. Then she stood before me, more beautiful than even my forest-dreaming had pictured her, more desirable than ever. She courtesied low, and the amazing mass of blue-black hair seemed an over heavy burden for the slim white neck to carry.

She smiled on me and I found my years dropping away like the leaves of the maple after its first mad dance to the tune of the Autumn's wind. I felt fully as young as when I saw her in Williamsburg. And time had placed a distance other than that of years between us: it had destroyed the old familiarity.

To my astonishment we were meeting as casual acquaintances, much as if a chin-high barrier was between us. It was nothing like that I had pictured. I had supposed we would pick up the cordiality at the first exchange of glances. I stuck out my hand and she placed her hand in it for a moment.

"Basdel, I would scarcely have known you. Taller and thinner. And you're very dark."

"Wind and weather," I replied. "It was at Howard's Creek I learned you were here. I was very anxious to see you."

"Don't stand." And she seated herself and I took a chair opposite her. "So nice of you to have us in mind. It's some three years since."

"I reckon your father doesn't fancy me much."

"He's displeased with you about something," she readily agreed. "You mustn't mind what he says. He's excitable."

"If I minded it I've forgotten it now," I told her. I now had time to note the cool, creamy whiteness of her arms and throat and to be properly amazed. She had been as sweet and fresh three years before, but I was used to town maids then, and accepted their charms as I did the sunshine and Spring flowers. But for three years I had seen only frontier women, and weather and worry and hard work had made sad work of delicate complexions.

"Now tell me about yourself," she commanded.

There was not much to tell; surveying, scouting, dispatch-bearing. When I finished my brief recital she made a funny little grimace, too whimsical to disturb me, and we both laughed. Then quite seriously she reminded me—

"But, Basdel, your last words were that you were to make a man of yourself."

In this one sentence she tagged my forest work as being valueless. Had I been the boy who rode through the May sunshine frantically to announce his poverty, I might have accepted her verdict as a just sentence. Now there was a calculating light in her dark blue eyes that put me on my mettle. She was throwing down a red ax.

"I am self-dependent," I said. "I never was that in Williamsburg. I have risked much. Before crossing the mountains, I did not dare risk even your displeasure. I have done things that men on the frontier think well of. When you knew me back East I only succeeded in making a fool of myself. The carrying of dispatches between Fort Pitt and Botetourt County is considered to be rather important."

"But, please mercy, there's more important things for young men to do than these you've mentioned," she softly rebuked.

"If the work of surveying lands for homes and settlements, if the scouting of wild country to protect settlements already established, if keeping a line of communication open between the Ohio and the James are not important tasks, then tell me what are?" I demanded.

She was displeased at my show of heat.

"There's no call for your defending to me your work over the mountains," she coldly reminded. "As an old friend I was interested in you."

"But tell me what you would consider to have been more important work," I persisted. "I honestly believed I was working into your good opinion. I believed that once you knew how seriously I was taking life, you would be glad of me."

"Poor Basdel," she soothed. "I mustn't scold you."

"Pitying me is worse," I corrected. "If you can't understand a man doing a man's work at least withhold your sympathy. I am proud of the work I have done."

This ended her softer mood.

"You do right to think well of your work," she sweetly agreed. "But there are men who also take pride in being leaders of affairs, of holding office and the like."

"And going into trade," I was rash enough to suggest.

With a stare that strongly reminded me of her father she slowly said:

"In trade? Why not? Trade is most honorable. The world is built up on trade. Men in trade usually have means. They have comfortable homes. They can give advantages to those dependent upon them. Trade? Why, the average woman would prefer a trader to the wanderer, who owns only his rifle and what game he shoots."

"Patsy, that is downright savagery," I warmly accused. "Come, be your old self. We used to be mighty good friends three years ago. Be honest with me. Didn't you like me back in Williamsburg?"

The pink of her cheeks deepened, but she quietly countered:

"Why, Basdel, I like you now. If I didn't I never would bother to speak plainly to you."

Three years picture-painting was turning out to be dream-stuff. I tried to tell myself I was foolish to love one so much like Ericus Dale; but the lure was there and I could no more resist it than a bear can keep away from a honey-tree.

She had shown herself to be contemptuous in reviewing the little I had done. She was blind to the glory of tomorrow and more than filled with absurd crotchets, and yet there was but one woman in America who could make my heart run away from control. If it couldn't be Patsy Dale it could be no one.

"Back in Williamsburg, before I made such a mess of my affairs, you knew I loved you."

"We were children—almost."

"But I've felt the same about you these three years. I've looked ahead to seeing you. I've—well, Patsy, you can guess how I feel. Do I carry any hope with me when I go back to the forest?"

The color faded from her face and her eyes were almost wistful as she met my gaze unflinchingly, and gently asked:

"Basdel, is it fair for a man going back to the forest to carry hope with him? The man goes once and is gone three years. What if he goes a second time and is gone another three years? And then what if he comes back, rifle in hand, and that's all? What has he to offer her? A home in the wilderness? But what if she has always lived in town and isn't used to that sort of life?"

"But if she loves the man——"

"But what if she believes she doesn't love him quite enough to take him and his rifle and live in the woods? Has he any more right to except that sacrifice than she has the right to expect him to leave the forest and rifle and make his home where she always has lived?"

"I suppose not. But I, too, like the scenes and things you like. I don't intend spending all my life fighting Indians and living in the forest."

"If your absence meant something definite," she sighed.

"Meaning if I were in trade," I bitterly said.

THE kindly mood was gone. She defiantly exclaimed:

"And why not? Trade is honorable. It gets one somewhere. It has hardships but it brings rewards. You come to me with your rifle. You talk sentiment. I listen because we were fond of each other in a boy-and-girl way. We mustn't talk this way any more. You always have my best wishes, but I never would make a frontier woman. I like the softer side of life too much."

"Then you will not wait? Will not give me any hope?"

"Wait for what? Another three years; and you coming back with your long rifle and horse. Is that fair to ask any woman?"

"No. Not when the woman questions the fairness. 'Another three years' are your words, not mine. I shall see this war through, and then turn selfish. What I have done is good for me. It will serve to build on."

"I'm sure of it," she agreed. "And you always have my best—my best wishes."

"And down in your heart you dare care some, or you wouldn't talk it over with me," I insisted.

"We liked each other as boy and girl. Perhaps

our talk is what I believe I owe to that friendship. Now tell me something about our backwoods settlements."

In story-writing the lover should, or usually does, fling himself off the scene when his attempt at love-making is thwarted. Not so in life with Patsy. I believed she cared for me, or would care for me if I could only measure up to the standard provided for her by her father's influence.

So instead of running away I remained and tried to give her a truthful picture of border conditions. She understood my words but she could not visualize what the cabins stood for. They were so many humble habitations, undesirable for the town-bred to dwell in, rather than the symbols of many, happy American homes. She pretended to see when she was blind, but her nods and bright glances deceived me none. She had no inkling of what a frontier woman must contend with every day, and could she have glimpsed the stern life, even in spots, it would be to draw back in disgust at the hardships involved.

So I omitted all descriptions of how the newly married were provided with homes by a few hours' work on the part of the neighbors, how the simple furniture was quickly fashioned from slabs and sections of logs, how a few pewter dishers and the husband's rifle constituted the happy couple's worldly possessions. She wished to be nice to me, I could see. She wished to send me away with amiable thoughts.

"It sounds very interesting," she said. "Father must take me over the mountains before we return to town."

"Do not ask him to do that," I cried. And I repeated the message sent by Mrs. Davis.

She was the one person who always had her own way with Ericus Dale. She smiled toleantly and scoffed:

"Father's cousin sees danger where there isn't any. No Indian would ever bother me once he knew I was my father's daughter."

"Patsy Dale," I declared in my desperation. "I've loved you from the day I first saw you. I love you now. It's all over between us because you have ended it. But do not for your own sake cross the mountains until the Indian danger is ended. Howard's Creek is the last place you should visit. Why, even this side of the creek I had to fight for my life. The Indians had murdered a family of four, two of them children."

She gave a little shudder but would not surrender her confidence in her father.

"One would think I intended going alone. I know the Indians are killing white folks, and are being killed by white folks. But with my father beside me——"

"If you love your father keep him on this side of the Alleghanies!"

"You will make me angry, Basdel. I don't want to be displeased with you. My father has known the Indians for years. He has warm friends in every tribe. He is as safe among them as he is here in Salem. And if Howard's Creek is in danger he can request the Indians to keep away from it."

"Good God! Are you as blind as all that?" I groaned.

"Forest-running, Basdel, has made you violent and rough in your talk," she icily rebuked. "You hate the Indians simply because you do not understand them. Now I'm positive that the best thing for you to do is to keep away from the frontier and see if you can't start right on this side of the mountains."

It would be folly to argue with her longer. I fished a pair of moccasins, absurdly small, from the breast of my hunting-shirt and placed them on the table. I had bought them from a squaw in White Eyes' village, and they were lavishly embroidered with gay beads. The squaw had laughed when I told the size I wanted.

"If you will forget these came from the forest and will let me leave them, I shall be pleased," I said. "If you don't care for them, just chuck them aside. I had to guess at the size."

"Oh, they are beautiful," she softly exclaimed, snatching them from the table. "Basdel, why not stay on this side of the mountains? You're a very clever young man if you would only give yourself a chance. Very soon you could go to the house of burgesses. If you don't care to go into trade you could speculate in land. Father is against it, but if it will be done, you might as well do it as to leave the cream for others."

"Even if I wished to stay, I could not," I replied. "I have much to do over there. Unfinished work. I have promised Colonel Lewis to carry dispatches when not scouting. If they can send some one to Fort Pitt in my place I shall serve as scout in the Clinch River valley. The people down there are badly upset."

"Well, giving yourself for others may be very Christian-like. One must decide for oneself," she said.

"The people over there help each other. They stand together. If I can help them, I shall be helping myself."

"I wish my father could go there and make them see how silly they are," she impatiently declared. "If they would only be friendly with the Indians! It is so simple——"

"I know a fellow about your age," I broke in. "The Indians killed his people on Keeney's Knob ten years ago and stole his little sister. He doesn't know whether she is dead or a captive. His folks were friendly. They were butchered after making a feast for Cornstalk and his warriors. There are many such cases. It would do no good for your father to tell

young Cousin and others, who happened to survive, that they are silly."

"Do you mean they would resent it?" she demanded, her chin going up in a very regal manner.

"He could scarcely change their opinions," I mumbled.

We were interrupted by a colored woman bustling in with Colonel Lewis' servant in tow. The man bowed profoundly before Patsy and then informed me:

"Please, Massa Morris, de c'unel 'mires fo' to see yo' at de house right erway. I 'spects it's business fo' de gun'ner. De c'unel mos' 'tic'lar dat say he wants to see yo' to once. Yas, sah. Please, sah."

I dismissed him with a word of my immediate attendance on the colonel. Then I gave my hand to Patsy and said:

"This ends it then. Patsy, my thoughts of you have helped me out of many tight places."

"If you'd only be sensible, Basdel, and stay back here where you belong. Just say the word and father will place you in his office. I'm sure of it."

"So am I sure of it, if you asked it. No, Patsy, it can't be that way. I thank you. I may be an awful failure, but I can always fool myself with hoping for better things. If I was pushed into trade, that would end me."

"Of course you know your limitations better than I do," she coldly said. "Thanks for the pretty moccasins. I may have a chance to wear them soon."

"Do not wear them over the mountains," I begged. "You were never meant for the frontier. Good-by."

I HAD mounted my horse and was galloping back to Richfield almost before I had realized how definitely I had separated from her. There was so much I had intended to say. My thoughts grew very bitter as I repeatedly lived over our short and unsatisfactory meeting. I recalled patches of the bright dreams filling my poor noodle when I was riding to meet her, and I smiled in derision at myself.

I had carried her in my heart for three years, and because daily I had paid my devotion to her I had been imbecile enough to imagine she was thinking of me in some such persistent way. Patsy Dale was admired by many men. Her days had been filled with compliments and flattery.

My face burned as though a whip had been laid across it when I recalled her frank scepticism of my ability to support a wife. I had a rifle. Several times she had thrust that ironical reminder at me, which meant I had nothing else. I came to her carrying my rifle. It was unfair to tie a girl with a promise when the wooer had only his rifle.

The damnable repetition kept crawling through my mind. She wanted to impress the fact of my poverty upon me. I worked up quite a fine bit of anger against Patsy. I even told myself that had I come back with profits derived from peddling rum to the Indians, I might have found her more susceptible to my approach. Altogether I made rather a wicked game of viewing the poor girl in an unsavory light.

With a final effort I declared half-aloud that she was not worth a serious man's devotion. And it got me nowhere. For after all, the remembrance of her as she stood there, with her slim white neck and the mass of blue-black hair towering above the upturned face, told me she must ever fill my thoughts.

I reached Richfield early in the evening. Governor Dunmore had retired against an early start for Williamsburg. It was Colonel Lewis' wish that I ride without delay to Charles Lewis' place at Staunton, something better than eighty miles, and confer with him over the situation on the frontier.

"My brother has recently received intelligences from Fort Pitt which state the Indians are anxious for peace," explained the colonel.

"A parcel of lies," I promptly denounced.

"So say I. But the written statements are very plausible. They have made an impression on Charles. It is very important that he know the truth. It will be much better for you to talk with him than for me to try and send him your statements in writing. Haste is necessary. Leave your horse and take one of mine."

"Have your man bring out the horse. I will start now."

"A prompt response," he said. "And most pleasing. But tomorrow early will do. Spend the night here."

"Tonight. Now," I insisted. "I need action."

He gave me a sharp glance, then called his man and gave the order. While my saddle was being shifted he informed me:

"Ericus Dale and John Ward paid us a call. Dale and his Excellency had a rare bout of words. The fellow Ward didn't say much, but he agreed to everything Dale said."

"I know about the way Dale talked," I gloomily said. "I talked with him before he came here. He thinks that Virginia is made up of fools, that only Pennsylvania knows how to handle the Indians."

I swung into the saddle and the colonel kindly said—

"I hope this business of mine isn't taking you away from something more pleasant."

"I thank you, colonel, but I am quite free. All I ask is action and an early return to the frontier."

I knew the colonel knew the truth. He knew I had paid my respects to the girl and had been dismissed. He stretched out a hand in silence

and gave me a hearty handshake; and I shook the reins and thundered up the road to Staunton.

CHAPTER VI

THE PACK-HORSE-MAN'S MEDICINE

CHARLES LEWIS was as popular as he was widely known. He had the gift of attracting men to him on short acquaintance, and of holding them as life-long friends. His fame as an Indain-fighter was known throughout the South, his adventures possessing those picturesque elements which strongly appeal to border-folks. During the Braddock and Pontiac wars his service was practically continuous.

In his home-life he was a kindly, gentle man. I found him playing with his five small children. He greeted me warmly and displayed none of his brother's austerity. During the greater part of two days which I was in his hospitable home I succeeded, I pride myself, in showing him the truth concerning the various reports sent over the line from Pennsylvania.

I know that when I left him he was convinced the war must be fought to a decisive finish before any of our western valleys could be safe. On one point he was very positive: the Cherokees, he insisted, would not join the Ohio tribes, despite the murder of Oconostota's brother. Could the people of the Clinch and Holston have felt the same confidence, they would have spared themselves much nagging.

I took my time in returning to Salem, for there was much to think over. The bulk of my meditations concerned Patsy Dale. I decided to see her once more before crossing the mountains. I had no hope of finding her changed, but I did not intend to leave a shadow of a doubt in my own mind. I would leave no room for the torturing thought that had I been less precipitate she would have been more kindly.

Yet I had no foolish expectations; I knew Patricia. This last interview was to be an orderly settlement of the whole affair, and assurance that self-accusation should not accompany me to the wilderness. Then with the war over there would be no overmountain ties to hold me back from the Kentucky country, or the Natchez lands.

I reached Richfield just as Colonel Lewis was setting forth to settle some wrangling between two of his captains. It was the old contention over enlistments, each leader charging the other with stealing men. I stopped only long enough to get my horse and to induce the colonel to let me have twenty pounds of powder and ten pounds of lead for the settlers. The lead was sufficient for seven hundred rounds and, divided into one-fourth portions, the powder would give a consciousness of power of eighty riflemen.

It was late afternoon when my fresh mount brought me to Salem, and without any hesitation—for I must move while my resolve was high—I galloped out to the Dale house. The low sun extended my shadow to a grotesque length as I flung myself from the saddle and with an attempt at a bold swagger advanced to find the maid. I am sure my bearing suggested great confidence, but it was purely physical.

Inwardly I was quaking and wondering how I should begin my explanation for this second call. I was a most arrant coward when I mounted the veranda. The carefully rehearsed calm of my leather face vanished and I made the discouraging discovery that my features were out of control. The door of the house was open. I rapped loudly and frowned. A shuffling step, which never could be Patricia's, nor yet heavy enough for Dale, finally rewarded my efforts. A colored women came to the door and ducked her portly form.

I began asking for Patricia, but she recognized me as a recent caller and broke in:

"De massa 'n de young missy done gwine 'way. Dat onery white man gone wif dem."

"Gone away? John Ward went with them?" I mumbled. "Which way did they ride, Aunty?"

"Dat a-way." And she pointed to the sun, now sliced in half by Walker's Mountain.

"You are sure they made for the mountains?"

"Dey gwine to slam right ag'in 'em, den ride ober dem," she declared.

So after all my warnings the Dales were foolhardy enough to ride into danger. Ericus Dale would not only stake his own life but even his daughter's on his faith in red men. I recalled Cornstalk's pretended friendship for the whites at Carr's Creek and on Jackson's River and the price the settlers paid for their trustfulness.

"When did they ride?"

"Two days ergo. Bright'n early in de mornin'."

I ran to my horse and mounted. As I yanked his head about, the servant called after me—

"De missy have dem mogasums wif her."

The first stage of my journey was to Dunlap's Creek, although there was no certainty that the Dales and Ward were taking that route. I had small doubt, however, but that Dale was bound for the home of his cousin on Howard's Creek. Unless he knew of some secret trace over the mountains he would follow the open trail.

He would be more likely to go boldly and openly, I reasoned, because of his belief there was nothing for him to fear. His daughter's convenience would be better suited by the main traveled trails. As I hurried to the west

I paused at every habitation and inquired for the travelers. Always the same reply; two men and a woman had been observed.

When I finally reached the Greenwood cabin at Dunlap's Creek I learned I had gained a day because of Patricia's need for rest. She was an odd bundle of contradictions. She felt superior to frontier women, and how they would have smiled at the thought of recuperating after the easy travel from Salem to the creek! Many of the women on the Greenbrier had walked the entire distance over the mountains so that the pack-animals might be used in carrying the jealously guarded and pitiably few household-goods.

It was amazing to contemplate what a difference two or three hundred miles could make in one's environment. Patricia Dale, soft and dainty, was used to the flattery of the town, and, I feared, the attention of many beaux. Her parents had known none of the comfortable places in life at her age; and yet she had responded to her environment, had been petted by it, and now she was a domestic kitten. I wondered if she would respond to her ancestry if placed among arduous experiences. I knew the kitten would, and therein I found hope for Patsy Dale.

I had been greatly shocked when told the girl was being taken over the mountains. Now by some peculiar mental twist I was beginning to enjoy secretly the prospect of seeing her again and in surroundings which harmonized with long rifles and hunting-shirts. On the surface I persisted in my anger at Dale and vehemently wished her back at Salem. Yet my guilty anticipation endured, and as a sop to conscience I tried to make myself believe there was no danger.

Howard's Creek could not be conquered so long as the settlers kept close to the cabins and fort. I believed that, or I should have urged a return of all the women to the east side of the mountains. If the enemy, in force, should lay a protracted siege, Howard's Creek would be remembered among other bloody annals.

But I knew there would be no prolonged attempt to massacre the settlement. Cornstalk was too wise a warrior to weaken his forces for a score of scalps when a general engagement was pending. Let him win that and he could take his time in blotting out every cabin west of the Alleghanies. So after all it was neither difficult nor illogical to convince myself the girl would be safe so long as she kept close to the creek.

Even Dale would not plan to take his daughter beyond the creek. If he attempted it there were men enough to prevent the mad act. Across this line of thought came the recollection of the Grisdols' fate. The girl would be safe at Howard's Creek, but death lined the trace leading thereto. My reason assured me Black Hoof's band had long since departed from the mountains.

My fear that the girl was being led into an ambush threw me into a fine sweat; and I pushed on the faster. I reviewed all the circumstances which would preclude the possibility of an Indian attack on the three travelers. There could be no Indians between Dunlap's and Howard's. Black Hoof's losses at the Grisdol cabin, the venomous hatred of young Cousin stalking them day and night and the appearance of Baby Kirst would surely hasten their retreat.

But there would obtrude the terrible possibility of a few raiders hiding along the trace, determined to strengthen their medicine with more white scalps. But never once did I count in favor of the girl, Dale's boasted friendship with the Shawnees. Even my most visionary listing of assets could not include that. I made a night-camp half-way across the mountains and dined on cold provisions procured from the Greenwoods.

THE morning brought optimism. By this time the girl was safe in the Davis cabin. I finished my prepared food and resumed my journey. I had covered a mile when a mounted figure turning a twist in the trace ahead sent me to the ground. The two of us struck the ground at about the same moment. Our rifles slid across the saddles as if we were puppets worked by the same string. Then a voice called out—

"I won't shoot if you won't."

Of course he was white.

"Jesse Hughes!" I exclaimed, vaulting into the saddle. "These are queer hunting-grounds for you." Then in sudden terror, "Are the Indians back here in the mountains?"

"Devil take worse luck! No," he grumbled as he trotted to meet me. "I'm going out to Greenwood's to see if I can't git a few shots of powder."

"Have you seen Ericus Dale, the trader?" I anxiously asked.

"Yes, I seen the fool. He was making the creek when I come off. His gal was with him and John Ward. Come pretty nigh potting that Ward feller. He's a white man, but —— me! I can't git it out of my noodle that he ain't a Injun."

"How did Dale's girl stand the journey?"

The query surprized him, and he looked puzzled.

"Stand it?" he slowly repeated. "Why, she ain't sick or hurt, is she?"

I said something about her not being used to riding long distances.

"Long distances!" he snorted. "Wal, if a woman can't foller a smooth trace on a good hoss for a day's ride, she ain't got no business

west of the mountains. Wal, I can't stick here swapping talk. I've got to push on and git that powder. Curse the luck!"

"The Greenwoods have no powder to spare. He has less than half a pound."

"Black devils in a pipe! Howard's Creek will have to go to making bows and arrers!"

"I've brought twenty pounds of powder and ten of lead from Salem," I added. "Howard's Creek is welcome to it after I've outfitted myself."

"Hooray! That ends that cussed trip. Twenty pounds! Wal, I declare if there won't be some rare killings! Now I'll hustle right back along with you. I've felt all the time that some one would be gitting hair that belonged to me if I come off the creek. Ten pounds of lead! Seven hundred little pills! That'll let Runner, Hacker, Scott'n me strike for the Ohio, where we can catch some of them red devils as they beat back home. They'll be keerless and we oughter nail quite a few."

"Crabtree isn't going with you?"

"Ike ain't got no stummick for a reg'lar stand-up fight. He'll hang round the creek and kill when he catches a red along."

"He'll get no powder from my stock to use around the creek," I declared.

Hughes eyed me moodily.

"What odds where they're killed so long as they're rubbed out?" he harshly demanded.

"Women and children are the odds," I retorted. "Crabtree kills friendly Indians. Even young Cousin, who hates reds as much as any man alive, won't make a kill in a settlement unless the Indians are attacking it."

"That's the one weak spot in Cousin," regretted Hughes. "He's a good hater. But he'd have a bigger count for that little sister of his if he'd take them wherever he finds them. It's all —— foolishness to pick and choose your spot for killing a red skunk. And this friendly Injun talk makes me sick! Never was a time but what half the Shawnees and other tribes was loafing 'round the settlements, pretending to be friends, while t'other half was using the tomahawk and scalping-knife.

"That sort of medicine won't do for me. No, siree! Injuns are a pest, just like wolves and painters, only worse. They must be wiped out. That's my belief and I make it my business to wipe them out. Few men that's got more'n me."

It's a waste of time to talk with a bloody-minded man. Hughes' brother was killed by the Indians. As for that, there was hardly a settler in Virginia who had not lost some dear friend or relative. When the history of the country is written, it will surprize the coming generations to read the many names having opposite them, "Killed by the Indians."

I was sorry I had met Hughes. His company grated on me. It was impossible to think of Patsy Dale with the fellow's cruel babble ringing in my ears. I remained silent and he garrulously recounted some of his many exploits, and with gusto decribed how he had trapped various victims. It was his one ambition of life. He cared nothing for land.

Offer him all of Colonel Washington's thirty-odd thousand acres on the Ohio and Great Kanawha as a gift, and he would have none of them unless they contained red men to slaughter. He had laid down a red path and it was his destiny to follow it. I had no love for Shawnee or Mingo, but my mind held room for something besides schemes for blood-letting.

And yet it was well for me that I had met Hughes the Indian-hater, and doubly well that I had brought powder and lead so that he had turned back with me. We were riding down the western slope and about clear of the mountains, I trying to thank my own thoughts and he talking, talking, his words dripping blood, when ahead in the trace I spied something on the ground that caused me to exclaim aloud.

It was a brightly beaded moccasin, very small, and strangely familiar even at a distance. Hughes saw it and stared at it through half-closed lids. I leaped from my horse and started forward to pick it up.

"Don't touch it;" yelled Hughes. "Come back! Come back!"

I heard him and understood his words, and yet I continued advancing while I mechanically endeavored to guess his reason for stopping me.

"Jump, you fool!" he yelled as I stretched out my hand to pick up the moccasin. And his horse was almost upon me and covering me with dirt as he pivoted and slid into the bushes, his hindquarters hitting me and hurling me over, half a dozen feet beyond the little moccasin. I landed on my head and shoulders with the crack of a rifle echoing in my dazed ears.

Instinct sent me rolling out of the trace and into the bushes. By the time I gained my knees and had cleared the dirt from my eyes Hughes was working rapidly up the right-hand slope. His horse stood at the edge of the bushes, rubbing noses with my animal. I kept under cover of the growth and halted abreast of the moccasin.

There was a furrow within a few inches of its embroided toe. I broke a branch and pawed the moccasin toward me and picked it up and went back to the horses. Then I took time to examine my prize. It was one of the pair I had given to Patsy Dale. She must have carried it carelessly to drop it in the trace without discovering her loss. I slipped it into my hunting-shirt and sat down to wait for Hughes. It was fully an hour before he came back.

"Couldn't git a crack at him," he growled, his face grim and sullen. "But you was a fool

to be took in by such a clumsy trick as that."

"It's an old trick," I conceded, taking the moccasin from my shirt. "If it had been any Indian finery I would have kept clear of it. But this happens to belong to Ericus Dale's girl. She dropped it coming down the slope."

He heard this in astonishment and scratched his head helplessly.

"Then I must 'a' been asleep, or in a —— of a hurry when I come to this slope," he muttered. "And it ain't just the right kind of a slope to go galloping over. I don't understand it a bit. They was riding into the settlement when I come out. I called to Dale and asked if he'd seen any Injun signs. He told me he hadn't seen any. Then that feller Ward come trotting out the woods, looking like a Injun, and I was bringing up my rifle to give him his needings when Dale let out a yelp and said he was a white man. Wal, it'll tickle the gal to learn how near her moccasin come to killing you."

"The Indian knew it was there and knew we were coming, and used it for bait," I mused.

"A five-year-old child would know that," was the scornful rejoinder. "But what no five-year-old on Howard's Creek would 'a' done was to go for to git it after I'd called a halt. You must 'a' been foolish in your mind. The Injun took a spot where he could line his gun on the moccasin. The growth cut off any sight of the trace 'cept where the moccasin lay. All he had to do was to line it and shoot when you stooped over it. The second he couldn't see the moccasin he'd know some one's body was between it and him. He heard you bawl out, but he didn't git sight of you till you was over it, and by that time my old hoss give you a belt and made you keep on moving."

"He undershot, yet as I was bending close to it he would have bagged me," I said. "I have to thank you for saving my life."

"Part of a day's work," he carelessly observed. "Wal, seeing as the skunk has skedaddled, we might as well push on rather smart and tell the fellers there's a loose red round these parts."

WHEN we entered the settlement we saw men and women gathered in front of the Davis cabin, frankly curious to see the newcomers and eager to volley them with questions. I joined the group and through a window beheld Patsy in animated conversation with what women could crowd inside. Mrs. Davis was very proud of her cousin's daughter and was preening herself considerably.

Patsy's cheeks were flushed and her tongue was racing as only a woman's can. As she talked I could see she was trying to get used to the table of split slabs and its four round legs set in auger-holes, the pewter tableware and the spoons and bowls fashioned from wood, and the gourds and hard-shell squash hollowed out for noggings.

With a slant of half-veiled eyes she also was studying the women's linsey petticoats and bare feet, for now that it was warm weather many dispensed with any foot-covering. In turn the women were openly examining the texture and style of her town gown, and shrilly calling on each other to come and admire her soft leather boots.

I did not see Dale, and Davis informed me he was inspecting the fort. As Ward was not in sight I assumed he, too, was at the fort. Making my way to the window, I caught Patsy's eye and handed her her lost moccasin.

She stared at the moccasin in bewilderment, but what with the newness of her experience and the voluble praise of the women and the open-eyed admiration of the men, she was finely excited. She forgot to ask where I found the moccasin or how I happened to be there. She was in the act of giving me a smile and a nod when Mrs. Davis tugged her to the right-about.

Realizing it was useless to strive for the girl's attention until the neighbors returned to their cabins, I walked to the fort, leading my horse. Hughes was there ahead of me and stood with a group of sullen-faced men who were being addressed by Ericus Dale.

"I say there ain't going to be any war," he cried as I took a position behind him. "The Indians don't want war. They want trade. Take a pack of goods on your horse and walk into a Shawnee village and see how quick they'll quit the war-post to buy red paint and cloth.

"Open a keg of New England rum among the Mingos and see how quick they'll drop their axes and hunt for tin dippers. Take blankets and beads to the Wyandots and watch them hang up white wampum. Take ——"

"Oh ——! That's all —— fool talk!" thundered Hughes, crowding forward and staring angrily into the trader's deep-set eyes. "You can't lead a pack-hoss fifty miles from this creek without losing your hair, neighbor."

"I can! I will!" wrathfully replied Dale. "I've traded for years with the Indians. I never yet went to them with a gun in my hand. If ever I need protection, they'll protect me. They are my friends. This war is all wrong. You can have it if you insist. But if you'd rather have trade, then you needn't build any more forts west of the Alleghanies."

Hughes laughed hoarsely and called out to the silent settlers:

"What do you fellers say to all this twaddle? Any of you believe it?"

Uncle Dick, whom I had left whetting his knife on the stones of the Davis fireplace, gave a cackling laugh and answered:

"Believe it? ——, no! But it's fun to hear him splutter."

The men smiled grimly. They had held back from affronting their neighbor's cousin. They looked upon Dale much as they looked on Baby Kirst when he came to the settlement and whimpered because he could not find ripe berries to pick. They were deciding that Dale was mentally irresponsible; only his malady took a different twist than did Baby's. He was an Indian-lover instead of hater. Dale's dark face flushed purple with anger. By an effort he controlled himself and said:

"All right. You men want a fight. I'm afraid you'll have it. But I tell you that if Dunmore would call off that dog of a Connolly at Fort Pitt I could go among the Ohio Indians and make a peace which would last."

"How about the Injuns being willing for us to go down into the Kentucky country?" spoke up Moulton.

"If you want peace with the Indian, you must let him keep a place to hunt and live in. He can't live if you take away his hunting-grounds."

"Then let's take 'em away so they'll die out tarnation fast," cried Elijah Runner.

"Whole batch an' b'ilin' oughter be hoofin' it through ——!" added Hacker.

Drawing himself up and speaking with much dignity, Dale said—

"I am sorry for any of you men who came out here to make homes if you will let a few Indian-killers, who never make homes, spoil your chances for getting ahead."

"We don't go for to kill every Injun we see," said Davis, heretofore silent. "I'm a family-man. I don't want Injuns butchered here in the settlement like as Ike Crabtree done for Cherokee Billy. No sense in that."

"That's what I say, too," agreed another. And this endorsement of Davis' view became quite general. Of course I had known right along that the settlers as a whole did not look with favor upon indiscriminate slaughter of the natives. Dale nodded his approval and said:

"Well, that's something. Only you don't go far enough."

Hughes angrily took up the talk, declaring:

"You cabin-men are mighty tickled to have us Injun-hating fellers come along when there's any chance of trouble. I've noticed that right along."

"Course we are, Jesse," agreed Davis. "But that don't mean we're mighty glad when some of you kill a friendly Injun in the settlement and, by doing so, bring the fighting to us."

"I 'low we've outstayed our welcome," Hughes grimly continued. "You folks foller this man's trail and it'll lead you all to the stake. I'm moving on tonight."

"Don't go away mad, Jesse," piped up old Uncle Dick. "Talk don't hurt nothin'. Stick along an' git your fingers into the fightin' what's bound to come."

"I'm going away to kill Injuns," was the calm reply. "That's my business."

"Hacker, Scott'n me will go along with you," said Runner. "Now that Howard's Creek has got a trader to keep the Injuns off, we ain't needed here no more."

"I *can* keep the Indians away," cried Dale. "When I offer them my belts, they'll be glad to receive them. You send them a few trade-belts in place of the bloody ax and they'll be your friends, too."

"Bah!" roared Hughes, too disgusted to talk.

"What does the white Injun say?" yelled one of the young men.

He had barely put the query before John Ward stalked through the fort door and stood at Dale's elbow. Speaking slowly and stressing his words in that jerky fashion that marks an Indian's speech in English, he said:

"The trader is right. I have been a prisoner among Indians for many years. I know their minds. Dale can go anywhere among Indians where he has been before, and no hand will be lifted against him."

"You're a liar!" passionately cried Hughes, his hand creeping to his belt.

Ward folded his arms across his deep chest and stared in silence at Hughes for nearly a minute; then slowly said:

"No Indian ever called me that. It's a man of my own race that uses the word to me."

"And a —— cheap sample of his race," boomed Dale, his heavy face convulsed with rage. "A cheap killer, who must strike from behind! Faugh! It's creatures like you——"

WITH an animal screech Hughes jumped for him. Before we could seize the infuriated man Ward's arm was thrust across his chest and with the rigidity of a bar of iron stopped the assault. Before Hughes could pull knife or ax from his belt we hustled him into the background. His three friends scowled ferociously but offered no interference. It was obvious that the settlers as a body would not tolerate any attack on Dale.

Inarticulate with rage, Hughes beckoned for Hacker, Scott and Runner to follow him. A few rods away he halted and called out:

"Dale, I'll live to hear how your red friends have danced your scalp. Then I'll go out and shoot some of them. That white Injun beside you will be one of the first to stick burning splinters into your carcass. He's lived with redskins too long to forget his red tricks. Come on, fellers."

This sorry disturbance depressed the spirits of the settlers. War was on, and there was none of the Howard's Creek men who believed

that any change in their attitude could prevent the Ohio Indians from slaying at every opportunity. No matter how much they might decry the acts of Hughes and his mates in time of peace, there was no denying the fighting-value of the quartet when it came to war.

No word was spoken until the last of the four killers had filed away to secure their horses and be gone. Then Davis said:

"Time to eat, Ericus. Let's go back and see how the women-folks is gettin' along."

"Keep that white scum from this creek until I can carry a bag of talk to Cornstalk and Logan and you won't need any armed bullies to protect you," said Dale.

"We ain't askin' of 'em to look after us, nor you with your white belts, neither," shrilly proclaimed Uncle Dick.

Some of the younger men laughed.

Dale reddened, but turned to walk with his cousin without making any answer. He all but bumped into me.

"Why, Morris!" he greeted, staring at me in surprize. "You bob up everywhere. Will you go with me to the Scioto villages?"

"Go as what?" I cautiously asked. The men gathered closer about us.

"Go as a trader, carrying white wampum. Go to make peace with the Shawnees," slowly replied Dale, his eyes burning with the fire of fanaticism.

"Not hankering for slow fires nor to have squaws heap coals on my head, I must refuse," I retorted. "But I'll go with you or any man, as a scout."

"In your blood, too," he jeered. "I didn't suppose you'd been out here long enough to lose your head."

"I'd certainly lose it if the Shawnees got me," I good-naturedly retorted. My poor jest brought a rumble of laughter from the men and added to Dale's resentment, which I greatly regretted.

John Ward glided to my side and said:

"You talk like a child. I have been long among the Indians. They did not take my head."

—— the fellow! I didn't like him. There was something of the snake in his way of stealthily approaching. I could not get it out of my head that he must be half-red. Had he been all Indian, I might have found something in him to fancy; for there were red men whom I had liked and had respected immensely. But Ward impressed me as being neither white nor red. He stirred my bile. Without thinking much, I shot back at him:

"Perhaps they did something worse to you than to take your head. Are you sure they didn't take your heart?"

He turned on his heel and stalked away. Dale snarled:

"You're worse than Hughes and those other fools. You even hate a poor white man who has been held a prisoner by the Indians. He comes back to his people and you welcome him by telling him he's a renegade. Shame on you!"

"No call for that sort of talk to Ward at all!" denounced Davis.

"What call had Ward to say he was a fool?" loudly demanded one of the young men.

"I shouldn't have said that," I admitted, now much ashamed of my hot-headedness. "I'll say as much to Ward when I see him next. If he'd look and act more like a white man then I'd keep remembering that he is white. But I shouldn't have said that."

"Morris, that's much better," said Dale. "I'll tell him what you said and you needn't eat your words a second time in public. I admire you for conquering yourself and saying it."

Uncle Dick did not relish my retraction, and his near-sighted eyes glared at me in disgust.

"Too much talkin'. Scouts oughter be out. Our friends, th' killers, have quit us."

Glad to be alone, I volunteered—

"I'll scout half the circle, striking west, then south, returning on the east side."

Moulton, a quiet, soft-spoken fellow, but a very demon in a fight, picked up his rifle and waved his hand to his wife and little girl and trotted in the opposite direction, calling back over his shoulders—

"I'll go east, north, and half-down the west side."

I finished on the north leg at the point where Moulton had commenced his scout. I made no discoveries while out. I walked to the fort and was glad to see that Moulton had but recently come in. I returned to the Davis cabin and passed behind it. So far as I could observe no sentinels had been posted on the east side of the clearing. In front of the cabin burned a big fire and there was a confusion of voices.

I gained a position at the end of the cabin, and from the shadows viewed the scene. It was old to me, but new to Patsy, and she was deeply interested. The young men had erected a war-post, and had painted the upper half red. Now they were dancing and cavorting around the post like so many red heathens, bowing their heads nearly to the ground and then throwing them far back. They were stripped to the waist and had painted their faces, and as they danced they stuck their axes into the post and whooped and howled according to the Indian ceremony of declaring war.

"I don't like it!" I heard Dale protest.

"But the boys only wanted Patsy to see how the Injuns git ready for war," defended Mrs. Davis. "An', Lor'! Ain't she all took up by it!"

"But it's the way the border men declared war after the murder at Yellow Creek,"

declared Dale. "They stripped and painted and struck the post and danced around it."

"They'll be through mighty soon now, Ericus," soothed Davis, who was uneasy between his fears of displeasing his wife's cousin and giving offense to the young men. "They meant well."

"All such actions means ill for the settlers," growled Dale. "They'd best finish at once."

DAVIS did not have to incur his neighbors' ill-will by asking the dancers to cease their ceremony, as Dale's speech was closely followed by a volley from the west side of the clearing. A dancer went down, coughing and clawing at his throat, while yelps of surprize and pain told me others had been wounded. I raised my rifle and fired toward the flashes.

With the promptness of seasoned veterans the young men kicked the fire to pieces and grabbed up their rifles and advanced toward the hidden foe, their movements being barely perceptible even while within reach of the light streaming from the cabins.

It was not until I had fired and was reloading that I was conscious of Patsy's ear-splitting shrieks. I heard her father fiercely command her to be still, then command Davis to recall the young men now lost in the darkness. A stentorian voice began shouting:

"All women to the fort! Put out all lights!"

One by one the candles were extinguished. Patsy was silent, and across the clearing came the low voices of the women, driving their children before them and urging them to hurry. Dark forms were discernible close at hand and were those settlers apportioned to defend the fort.

Davis was commanding his wife to take Patsy to the fort while there was yet time, and she was refusing. The savages must have heard the men and women leaving the outlying cabins, for they started to rush from the woods only to fall back before a brisk volley from the young men now scouting well to the front.

I walked to the cabin door just as the war-whoop of the Shawnees announced an attack in force. I was standing by Patsy's side, but she did not see me. She had both hands clapped over her ears, her lips parted but uttering no sound. Now there came a rush of feet and the young men fell back, some making into the fort, others, as previously assigned, entering the cabins close to the fort. Three came to the Davis cabin, and I entered with them, leading Patsy. Some one, I think it was Davis, dragged Dale inside.

The trader seemed to be paralyzed, for he had remained voiceless during the stirring events. And it had all been a matter of a few minutes. I jumped through the doorway just as a young man began closing it. The Shawnees were yelling like demons and approaching to close range very cautiously, feeling out each rod of the ground.

The sally of the young men had taught them they could not have all things their own way. I scouted toward the fort to make sure all the women and children had made cover, but before I could reach the log walls I heard Dale's voice shouting for attention. I dropped behind a stump, and as the savages ceased their howling I heard him hoarsely crying:

"It is the Pack-Horse-Man speaking. Do the Shawnees fire guns at the Pack-Horse-Man? My friends live here. Do the Shawnees hurt the friends of the Pack-Horse-Man? I give you a belt to wash the red paint from your faces. I give you a belt to make the road smooth between the Greenbriar and the Scioto. By this belt the nettles and rocks shall be removed from the road. I will cover the bones of your dead, if any fell this night, with many presents."

He was either very brave or crazy. For now he left the cabin and began walking toward the hidden Shawnees, his confident voice repeating the fact he was the red man's friend, that he brought white belts, that the red and white men should eat from one dish, and that a hole should be dug to the middle of the earth and the war-ax buried there and a mighty river turned from its ancient bed to flow over the spot so that the ax could never be found.

His amazing boldness brought the hush of death over cabins and forts. My horse, secured in the small stockaded paddock near the fort, whinnied for me to come to him, and his call in that tense stillness set my nerves to jumping madly. Dale was now close to the warriors. Every minute I expected to see a streak of fire, or hear the crunch of an ax. Trailing my rifle and bent double, I stole after him. From the forest a deep voice shouted:

"The belts of the Pack-Horse-Man are good belts. Black Hoof's warriors do not harm the friends of the Pack-Horse-Man. Sleep with your cabin doors open tonight and you shall hear nothing but the call of the night birds and the voice of the little owl talking with the dead."

I now discovered that the Shawnees had silently retreated to the woods at the beginning of Dale's advance. The declaration of peace as given by the Indian—and I was convinced it was the famous Black Hoof talking—was in the Shawnee tongue. Dale faced to the cabins and fort and triumphantly interpreted it. From deep in the forest came a pulsating cry, the farewell of the marauders, as they swiftly fell back toward New River. I was suspicious of some Indian trick and yelled a warning for the men to keep in the cabins.

Dale became very angry, and upbraided me, saying:

"It's the like of you that spoils the Indian's heart. You men have heard what the Black Hoof says. You men and women of Howard's Creek are foolish to believe this young fool's words. The Shawnees have gone. You heard their travel-cry. They have left none behind to harm by treachery. I told you I could keep the Indians from attacking this settlement. Could your friends, the killers, have sent them away so quickly? I think not. Open your doors. Light your candles. Make merry if you will. There is nothing in the forest to harm you."

"Keep inside till I and some of the young men have scouted the woods. Three men from the fort will be enough," I loudly shouted.

Dale was furious, but that was nothing when the women and children had to be remembered. Soon a soft pattering of moccasins, and three youths stood before me. Choosing one, I set off in the direction the Indians apparently had taken. The other two were to separate, one scouting south and the other north, to discover any attempt at a surprize attack by swinging back to the creek in a half-circle.

My companion and I, although hampered by the darkness, penetrated some miles toward New River. In returning, we separated, one swinging south and the other north. The first morning light was burning the mists from the creek when I reentered the clearing. My companion came in an hour later. The other two had returned much earlier, having had a much shorter course to cover. We all made the same report; no signs of Indians except those left by them in their retreat.

I sat outside the Davis cabin and Patsy brought me some food. She was very proud of her father and carried her small figure right grandly. Her attitude toward the women was that of a protector; and they, dear souls, so thankful to be alive, so eager to accept the new faith, fairly worshiped the girl.

The one exception was the Widow McCabe. She paid homage to no one. And while she said nothing to the chorus of admiring exclamations directed at the trader there was the same cold glint in the slate-gray eyes, and she walked about with her skirts tucked up and an ax in her hand.

I MADE no effort to talk with Patsy. Her frame of mind was too exalted for speech with a sceptical worm. She smiled kindly on me, much as a goddess designs to sweeten the life of a mortal with a glance. She smiled in gentle rebuke as she noted my torn and stained garments and the moccasins so sadly in need of patching.

"You silly boy! It wasn't necessary. When will you learn, Morris?" It was not intended that I should answer this, for she turned away graciously to receive the blessings of the women. Thus, vicariously, was Ericus Dale recognized as a great man. And the trader walked among the morning clouds. For some hours the savor of his triumph stifled speech, and he wandered about while the women paid their tribute through his daughter.

Nor were the men lacking in appreciation. The younger generation remained silent, secretly wishing their bravery and marksmanship had scattered the foe, yet unable to deny that Dale's medicine had been very powerful. Those with families stared upon him as they might gaze on one who had looked on David.

They congregated around the Davis cabin after the morning meal and forgot there was much work to be done. They were eager to renew their fires of this new faith by listening to him. And after his exaltation had softened enough to permit of speech the trader once more harangued them on his influence over the natives. He was constantly in motion, his swinging arms keeping a path clear as he strode through the group and back again and addressed the mountains and horizon. He was too full of the sweets of a peaceful victory to confine his utterance to any individual, and he spoke to the whole frontier.

He concluded a long and eloquent speech by saying:

"So after all, as you settlers have learned, the Ohio tribes, yes, and all tribes, will always hark to the one word—trade. They are now dependent upon the white man for traps and guns, even their women's clothing. Trade with them and they will remain your friends, for your goods they must have.

"You can plant your war-posts three feet apart along the whole length of Virginia, and you'll always have work for your rifles and axes until the last Indian-hunter is killed. I admit they can be exterminated, but you'll pay an awful price in doing it. But give them a chance to live, carry trade-belts to them, and you shall have peace."

Even Uncle Dick, the aged one, had nothing to say. But it was Patsy I was watching while Dale talked. She never took her eyes from him, and her gaze was idolatrous in its love. She believed in his powers implicitly; and to bask in the reflection of his greatness was the sweetest triumph she had ever experienced. Throughout that day the scouts were busy in the forest, ranging very far on the track of Black Hoof's band. When they began dropping in after sundown all their reports were alike.

There were no Indian-signs besides those left by the departing Shawnee band. This band, said the scouts, was very large and quite sufficent to cause the settlement much trouble and inevitable losses. There was no mistaking the story told by the trail. The Indians had marched rapidly, swinging north.

Every emotion, unless it be that of love, must have its ebb; and by nightfall the settlers were returning to their old caution. Dale did not relish this outcroppong of old habits. Throwing open the door of the Davis cabin after Davis had closed and barred it, he cried: "Let us have air. There is no danger. You're like silly children afraid of the dark. Your scouts have told you there are no Indians near. Yet the minute the sun sets you imagine the woods are full of them. I will go out alone and unarmed and I will shout my name. If any Shawnee who was not in Black Hoof's band hears my voice he will come to me. After he learns I have friends here on Howard's Creek, he will go away. Give me time to act before that scoundrel Connolly can stir up more trouble and I'll make a lasting peace between the Greenbriar, the Clinch and the Holston and the Ohio tribes; and I'll make Dunmore look like a fool."

His overpowering personality, his massive way of asserting things made a deep impression on the simple folks. They asked only for a chance to plant and reap. When he went out alone that night he brought them deep under his spell. As he plunged into the forest and stumbled about he took pains to advertise his presence. Unknown to the settlers, I trailed him. I was within ten feet of him when he halted and shouted his name, and in their language called on the Shawnees to come to him.

For half an hour he wandered about, proclaiming he was the Pack-Horse-Man, the ancient friend of the Shawnees and Mingos. Let him be a fool according to Jesse Hughes' notion, yet he was a very brave man. He had the courage to attempt proof of his belief in the honesty of the Shawnees.

I trailed him back to the cabin door. I saw the girl's radiant face as she proudly threw her arms about his neck. I saw the great pride in his own face as he stood in the middle of the floor and harshly demanded—

"Now, who will you believe; Dale, the trader, or Hughes the killer?"

It was all mighty dramatic, and it was not surprizing that it should affect the settlers keenly. It shook my skepticism a bit, but only for the moment. If I could not feel a full confidence in John Ward, born white, how could I place a deep and abiding trust in those who were born red? Had not Cornstalk and other chiefs, the best of their breed, sworn friendship to the whites in Virginia in 1759 and during Pontiac's War? Had they not feasted with old friends, and then, catching them off their guard, chopped them down? Black Hoof had drawn off his raiders; so far, so good. But I looked to my flints none the less carefully that night and made the rounds to see that reliable men were on guard. The night passed with nothing to disturb the settlement's rest.

CHAPTER VII

LOST SISTER

PATSY stood in the doorway of the Davis cabin when I approached to pay my respects. She was wearing a linsey petticoat and a short gown for an overskirt. Her mass of wonderful hair was partly confined by a calico cap, and on her feet were my gift moccasins. She believed she was conforming to the frontier standard of dress, but she was as much out of place as a butterfly at a bear-baiting. Before I could speak she was advancing toward me, her hands on her hips, her head tilted back, and demanding—

"What do you say now about the influence of trade and the trader?"

She did not ask that she might learn my opinion; she firmly believed there was but one thing I could say. She was in an exultant mood and happy to parade her triumph. Of course she was proud of her father and was viewing him as the deliverer of the settlement. Without waiting for me to answer she excitedly continued:

"And your long rifle! And the rifles of all these other men! What good would they have done? They spoke night before last, and the Indians kept up their attack. Then my father spoke and the Indians have gone! John Ward, who was out scouting when the Indians attacked, says they greatly outnumbered us and were led by Black Hoof, one of their greatest chiefs. He says they would have captured or killed us if not for my father. Now, Mr. Rifleman, what do you think about the influence of an honest trader?"

I would not have shaken her pride in her father even had that accomplishment been possible. To convince her—which was not possible—that her father's success was no success at all, that Black Hoof's behavior was simply an Indian trick to lull us into a foolish sense of security, would mean to alienate even her friendship, let alone killing all chance of her ever reciprocating my love.

While not deeply experienced with women, my instinct early taught me that my sex is most unwise in proving to a women that she is wrong. She will hold such procedure to be the man's greatest fault. It is far better to let her discover her own errors, and even then pretend you still cling to her first reasoning, thereby permitting her to convince you that she was wrong.

On the other hand there was, I sensed, a peril in the situation, a peril to Howard's Creek, that made my seeming acquiescence in her opinion very distasteful to me. I had no

proof of my suspicions except my knowledge of Indian nature and my familiarity with frontier history. A red man can be capable of great and lasting friendships. But to judge him, when he is at war, by the standards of the white race is worse than foolish.

Cornstalk, according to his blood, was a great man. Under certain conditions I would trust him with my life as implicitly as I would trust any white man. Under certain conditions I would repose this same trust in him although he was at war with my race. But when placed among the combatants opposing him, I knew there was no subterfuge even that great warrior would not use to attain success.

So I said nothing of my doubts, nothing of my vague suspicions concerning John Ward. I felt a strong antipathy toward the fellow, and I realized this dislike might prejudice me to a degree not warranted by the facts. To put it mildly his status puzzled me. If he were an escaped prisoner then he had committed one of the gravest sins in the red man's entire category.

To be taken into the tribe, to be adopted after his white blood had been washed out by solemn ceremony, and then to run away, meant the stake and horrible preliminary tortures should he be recaptured. As a prize such a runaway would be more eagerly sought than any settler. And yet the fellow was back on the fringe of imminent danger and ranging the woods unconcernedly. His captivity must have taught him that every war-party would be instructed to bring him in alive if possible.

"What's the matter with you, Basdel?" demanded the girl sharply as she turned and walked by my side toward the Davis cabin. "You act queer. Do you begrudge giving my father his due? Aren't you thankful he was here to stop the attack on the settlement?"

"If he were here alone, yes. But I am terribly worried because you are here, Patsy."

"But that's doubting my father's influence!" she rebuked, her eyes lighting war-signals.

"When one has loved, one stops reasoning," I quickly defended. "I can not bear to see even a shadow of a chance of harm come to you."

"That was said very pretty," she smiled, her gaze all softness.

Then with calm pride she unfastened several strings of white wampum from around her slender waist and holding them up simply said—

"My father's belts."

Among the strings was a strip some seven or eight rows in width and two hundred beads long. It was pictographic and showed a man leading a pack-horse along a white road to a wigwam. The figures, like the road, were worked in white beads, the background being dark for contrast.

Refastening them about her waist, she said:

"There is no danger for me here so long as I wear my father's belts. There are none of the Ohio Indians who would refuse to accept them and respect them. When they see the pack-horse-man walking along the white road to their villages they will lift that belt up very high."

"When one sees you, there should be no need of belts," I ventured.

She smiled graciously and lightly patted my fringed sleeve, and ignoring my fervid declaration, she gently reminded:

"Even if I had no belts I am no better than any of the other women on the creek. Don't think for a moment I would hide behind my father's trade wampum. The belts must protect all of us, or none of us. But there is no more danger for me than there is for them even if I threw the belts away. Not so much; because I am Ericus Dale's daughter. Basdel, it makes me unhappy to fear that when we leave here the danger may return to these people. I carry my safety with me. I wish I could leave it for them. I wish a general and lasting peace could be made."

"God knows I wish the same," I cried. "As for being no better than these other women, I agree to that." And she became suddenly thoughtful. "In judging from a Howard's Creek standpoint you are not so good in many ways. Rather, I should say, not so valuable."

"You measure a woman's value as you do your guns and horses," she murmured.

Her calmness was rather ominous, and I feared I had bungled. Yet my meaning should have been transparent even to a child. To make sure she had not misconstrued me I explained:

"You know what I mean, no matter how I appear to measure you. In making a new country a woman on the edge of things must have certain qualities that the town woman does not possess, does not need to possess. It's because of these qualities that the new country becomes possible as a place to live in; then the town woman develops. Two hundred miles east are conditions that resulted from the rugged qualities of the first women on the first frontier.

"Those first women helped to make it safe for their children's children. Now it's behind the frontier and women of your kind live there. In other words—" I was growing a trifle desperate, for her gaze, while persistent, was rather blank—"you don't fit in out here. I doubt if you know how to run bullets or load a gun or throw an ax. I'm sure you'd find it very disagreeable to go barefooted. It isn't your place. Your values shine when you are back in town. That's why I'm sorry you're here."

"I haven't shot a rifle, but I could learn," she quietly remarked.

"I believe that," I heartily agreed. "But could you take an ax and stand between a drove of children and what you believed to be a band of Indians about to break from cover and begin their work of killing? I saw the Widow McCabe do that. I saw the little Moulton woman, armed with an ax, run to meet the attack."

"It's hardly sensible to ask if I could have done this or that. Who knows what I could have done? I shall never have to deal with what is past. And there was a time, I suppose, when all these women were new to the frontier. At least I should be allowed time to learn certain things before you apply your measuring-rod, sir!"

"That's right," I admitted. "I was rather unjust, but the fact remains that just now you are out of place and not used to this life and its dangers."

"I feel very cross at you. You pass over my father's great work for the settlement with scarcely a word. You complain because I am here and look different from Mrs. Davis. I can't help my looks."

"You are adorable. Already see the havoc you've wrought among the unmarried men. Observe how many times each finds an errand that takes him by this cabin door. How slow they are to scout the woods and seek signs. No; you can't help your looks, and it results there are few men who can resist loving you. There's not a youngster in this settlement who's not up to his neck in love with you already. And there's not one of them who does not realize that you would be the poorest mate he could pick so long as he must live on the border."

"I'm glad to hear just what you believe about me," she muttered. "But you're bewildering. It seems I'm a rare prize for any man and a most uncomfortable burden."

"Oh, dash it all, Patsy! You understand that what I've said applies to Howard's Creek. If we were standing two hundred miles due east I should say directly the opposite."

OF COURSE she understood my true meaning, and of course in her heart she agreed with it. She was town-bred and therefore was intended for the town. Yet so strangely stubborn and eccentric is a woman's reasoning that she can feel resentment toward a man because he has brains enough to comprehend the same simple truth that she comprehends.

Had there been no danger from the Indians I could have scored a bull's-eye with her by baldly declaring her to be the most valuable asset the frontier ever had received; and she would have dimpled and smiled and but faintly demurred, knowing I was a rock-ribbed liar for asserting it, and yet liking me the more for the ridiculous exaggeration. That is one reason why it is more sensible and much more satisfactory to quarrel with a man than with a woman.

With the tenacity which her sex displays when believing a male is trying to avoid some issue, she coldly reminded—

"Talk, talk, but not a word yet as to what my father did two nights ago."

"It was one of the most splendid exhibitions of faith and moral courage I ever witnessed."

Her gaze grew kindly again and she halted and stared up into my eyes, flushed with pleasure, and waited to hear more encomiums.

"I never before saw one man rush out and confront a war-party. Then his going out alone last night and prowling about through the dark forest! That was magnificent. Your father is one of the bravest men I ever saw."

She rubbed a pink finger against her nose and tilted her head and weighed my words thoughtfully. Obviously I had omitted something; for with a little frown worrying her fair forehead she began:

"But—bu' there's something else you haven't said. What about his influence over the Indians? You thought him foolish to take me over the mountains. You now admit you were foolish to think that?"

She was waiting for me to complete my confessional. If the element of danger had been absent how gladly I would have lied to her! How quickly I would have won her approval by proclaiming myself the greatest dolt in Virginia and her father the wisest man in the world! But to accede to everything she said and believed would be an endorsement of her presence on the creek. I had had no idea of ousting myself from her good graces when I went to find her that morning. Now the test had come, and her welfare was involved; to be true to her as well as to myself I was forced to say:

"I still think it was most dangerous for you to come here. I believe your father acted very unwisely, no matter how much he believes in his influence over the Indians. And I would thank God if you were back in Williamsburg."

Her hands dropped to her side. The smiling eyes grew hard.

"Go on!" she curtly commanded.

"I've damned myself in your opinion already. Isn't that enough? Don't make me pay double for being honest."

"Honest?" she jeered. "You've deliberately dodged my question. I asked you what you thought of my father's power with the Indians. You rant about his wickedness in bringing me here. For the last time I ask you to answer my question and finish your list of my father's faults."

As if to make more steep the precipice down which from her esteem I was about to plunge

there came the voice of her father, loudly addressing the settlers.

"You people ought to wake up," he was saying. "Was it your rifles, or was it trade that stopped an attack on these cabins night before last? When will you learn that you can not stop Indian wars until you've killed every Indian this side the mountains? Has there ever been a time when you or your fathers could stop their raids with rifles? Well, you've seen one raid stopped by the influence of trade."

As he paused for breath the girl quietly said—

"Now, answer me."

And I blurted out:

"I don't have any idea that Black Hoof and his warriors will hesitate a second in sacking Howard's Creek because of anything your father has said or could say. I honestly believe the Shawnees are playing a game, that they are hoping the settlers are silly enough to think themselves safe. I am convinced that once Black Hoof believes the settlers are in that frame of mind he will return and strike just as venomously as the Shawnees struck in the old French War and in Pontiac's War, after feasting with the whites and making them believe the red man was their friend."

She straightened and drew a deep breath, and in a low voice said:

"At last you've answered me. Now go!"

I WITHDREW from the cabin and from the group of men. Dale's heavy voice was doubly hateful in my ears. The settlement was a small place. Patsy had dismissed me, and there was scarcely room for me without my presence giving her annoyance. I went to the cabin where I had left my few belongings and filled my powder-horn and shot-pouch. I renewed my stock of flints and added to my roll of buckskins, not forgetting a fresh supply of "whangs" for sewing my moccasins. While thus engaged Uncle Dick came in and began sharpening his knife at the fireplace.

"Why do that?" I morosely asked. "You are safe from Indian attacks now the trader has told the Shawnees you are under his protection."

He leered at me cunningly and rán his thumb along the edge of the knife and muttered:

"If some o' th' varmints will only git within strikin'-distance! They sure ran away last night, but how far did they go? Dale seems to have a pert amount o' authority over 'em; but how long's he goin' to stay here? He can't go trapezin' up'n down these valleys and keep men'n women from bein' killed by jest hangin' some white wampum on 'em."

"What do the men think?"

"Them that has famblies are hopin' th' critters won't come back. Younger men want to git a crack at 'em. Two nights ago th' younkers thought Dale was mighty strong medicine. A night or two of sleep leaves 'em 'lowin' th' creek may be safe s'long as he sticks here. Some t'others spit it right out that Black Hoof is playin' one o' his Injun games. If that pert young petticoat wa'n't here mebbe we could git some o' th' young men out into th' woods for to do some real scoutin'.

"If my eyes was right I'd go. As it is th' young folks keep runnin' a circle round th' settlement, lickety-larrup, an' their minds is on th' gal, an' they wouldn't see a buf'lo if one crossed their path. Then they hustle back an' say as how they ain't seen nothin'. I 'low some o' th' older men will have to scout."

"I'm going out. I'll find the Indians' trail and follow it," I told him.

"That'll be neighborly of you. If they chase you back an' git within stickin'-distance I'll soon have their inwards out to dry."

I decided to leave my horse, as the travel would take me through rough places. Shouldering my rifle, I struck for the western side of the clearing. Dale had disappeared, gone into the Davis cabin, I assumed, as John Ward was lying on the ground near the door. I hadn't seen much of Ward for two days. Davis and Moulton were drawing leather through a tan trough, and I turned aside to speak with them. They noticed I was fitted out for a scout and their faces lighted a bit.

"Ward's been out ag'in and says the reds went north toward Tygart's Valley. He follered 'em quite some considerable. If you can find any new signs an' can fetch us word——"

"That's what I'm going out for, Davis. How do you feel about the doings of night before last?"

He scratched his chin and after a bit of hesitation answered:

"Wife's cousin is a mighty smart man. Powerful smart. I 'low he knows a heap 'bout Injuns. Been with 'em so much. But we're sorter uneasy. More so today then we was yesterday. This waiting to see what'll happen is most as bad, if not worse, then to have a fight an' have it over with. Once a parcel of Injuns strikes, it either cleans us out or is licked an' don't want no more for a long time. Still Dale has a master lot of power among the Injuns. But we'll be glad to know you're out looking for fresh footing. Their trail oughter be easy to foller, as there was a smart number of 'em had hosses."

"I'll find the trail easy enough, and I'll satisfy myself they are still making toward the Ohio or have swung back," I assured him. "While I'm gone keep the young men in the woods and post sentinels. Don't get careless. Don't let the children wander from the cabins. I'm free to tell you, Davis, that I don't believe for a second that you've seen the last of Black

Hoof and his men. Have all those living in the outlying cabins use the fort tonight."

After reaching the woods, I turned and looked back. Dale was standing in the doorway with one hand resting on the shoulder of John Ward. Ward was talking to Patsy, whose dainty figure could not be disguised by the coarse linsey gown.

The man Ward must have lost some of his taciturnity, for the girl was laughing gaily at whatever he was saying. I observed that Dale was still feeling very important in his rôle of protector, for as he stepped from the doorway he walked with a swagger. Well, God give that he was right and that the menace had passed from Howard's Creek

I FOUND the trail where it turned back toward Tygart's Valley, even as John Ward had reported, and followed it up the Greenbriar. The country here was very fertile on both sides of the river and would make rich farms should the danger from the Indians ever permit it to be settled. Farther back from the river on each hand the country was broken and mountainous and afforded excellent hiding-places for large bodies of Indians, as only rattlesnakes, copperheads, wolves and wildcats lived there.

My mood was equal to overdaring, and all because of Patsy Dale. When the sun swung into its western arc I halted where a large number of warriors had broken their fast. I ate some food and pushed on. After two miles of travel I came to a branching of the trail. Two of the band had turned off to the northeast. My interest instantly shifted from the main trail to the smaller one, for I assumed the two were scouting some particular neighborhood, and that by following it I would learn the object of their attention and be enabled to give warning.

That done, the footing would lead me back to the main band. The signs were few and barely sufficent to allow me to keep up the pursuit. It was not until I came to a spring, the overflow of which had made muck of the ground, that I was afforded an opportunity to inspect the two sets of tracks. One set was made by moccasins almost as small as those I had given to Patricia Dale.

But why a squaw on a war-path? It was very puzzling. From the amount of moisture already seeped into the tracks I estimated the two of them had stood there within thirty minutes. My pursuit became more cautious. Not more than twenty rods from the spring I came to a trail swinging in from the east, as shown by a broken vine and a bent bush.

The newcomer had moved carelessly and had fallen in behind the two Indians. I stuck to the trail until the diminished sunlight warned me it would soon be too dark to continue. Then I caught a whiff of burning wood and in ten minutes I was reconnoitering a tiny glade.

My first glance took in a small fire; my second glance dwelt upon a scene that sent me into the open on the jump. An Indian sat at the foot of a walnut-tree, his legs crossed and his empty hands hanging over his knees. At one side crouched a squaw, her long hair falling on each side of her face and hiding her profile. In a direct line between me and the warrior stood Shelby Cousin, his rifle bearing on the warrior.

My step caused him to turn, expecting to behold another native. The man on the ground made no attempt to take advantage of the interruption; and in the next second Cousin's long double-barrel rifle was again aiming at the painted chest.

"Don't go for to try any sp'ilin' o' my game," warned Cousin without looking at me.

"They're scouts from a big band of Shawnees now making toward Tygart's Valley," I informed him. "Can't we learn something from them?"

"I'm going to kill this one now. The squaw can go. Crabtree would snuff her out, but I ain't reached the p'int where I can do that yet."

"You coward!" cried the squaw in excellent English.

Cousin darted a puzzled glance at her. His victim seemed to be indifferent to his fate; nor did the woman offer to interfere.

"She's a white woman!" I cried. For a sunbeam straggled through the growth and rested on the long hair and revealed it to be fine and brown and never to be mistaken for the coarse black locks of an Indian.

"White?" faltered Cousin, lowering his rifle. "Watch that devil, Morris!"

I dropped on a log with my rifle across my knees. Cousin strode to the woman and caught her by the shoulder and pulled her to her feet. For a long minute the two stared.

"Shelby?"

The words dropped from her lips in a sibilous crescendo as her blood drove her to a display of emotion.

Cousin's hands slowly advanced and pushed back the long locks. He advanced his face close to hers, and I knew his slight form was trembling. Then he staggered back and jerkily brought his arm across his eyes.

"God! It's my sister!" I heard him mutter.

I leaped to my feet, crying out for him to be a man. He remained motionless with his arm across his face, helpless to defend himself. I turned to the woman. Whatever light had shone in her eyes when memory forced his name from her lips had departed.

Her face was cold and immobile as she met my wild gaze. There was a streak of yellow paint running from the bridge of her nose to the

parting of her brown hair. Her skin was as dark as any Shawnee's, but her eyes held the blue of the corn-flower.

I tried to discover points of resemblance between her and the boy and succeeded only when she turned her head in profile; then they were very much alike. He lowered his arm to look over it, and she watched him without changing her expression.

With a hoarse cry he straightened and answering the impulse in his heart, sprang toward her, his arms outstretched to enfold her. She gave ground, not hastily as though wishing to avoid his embrace, but with a sinuous twist of her lithe body, and she repulsed him by raising her hand. He stared at her stupidly, and mumbled:

"You remember me. You called my name. You know I am your brother. You know we lived on Keeney's Knob. You remember the creek——"

"I remember," she quietly interrupted. "A very long time ago. Very long. I am a Shawnee now. My heart is red."

Her words stunned him for a bit, then he managed to gasp out, "Who is this man?" And he glared at the warrior seated at the foot of the walnut.

"My husband."

The boy's mouth popped open, but without uttering a sound he stooped and grabbed for his rifle. I placed my foot on it and seized his arm and pleaded with him to regain his senses before he took any action. During all this the warrior remained as passive as the tree-roots against which he half-reclined.

After a brief hysterical outburst Cousin stood erect and ceased struggling with me. And all the time his sister had watched us speculatively, her gaze as cold and impersonal as though she had been looking at a rock. It was very hideous. It was one of those damnable situations which must end at once, and to which there can be no end. For the boy to kill his sister's husband was an awful thing to contemplate.

I pulled the lad back and softly whispered:

"You can't do it. The blood would always be between you two. She has changed. She believes she is red. Take her aside and talk with her. If she will go with you make for the mountains and get her to the settlements."

"An' him?"

"I will wait an hour. If you two do not return before an hour— Well, he will not bother you."

At first he did not seem to understand; then he seized my free hand and gripped it tightly. Taking his rifle, he approached the girl and took her by the arm.

"Come," he gently told her. "We must talk, you and I. I have hunted for you for years."

She was suspicious of us two, but she did not resist him.

"Wait," she said.

She glided to the savage and leaned over him and said something. Then she was back to her brother, and the two disappeared into the woods.

I drew a line on the savage and in Shawnee demanded—

"Throw me the knife she gave you."

Glaring at me sullenly, he flipped the knife toward the fire and resumed his attitude of abstraction. I had never killed an unarmed Indian. I had never shot one in cold blood. The office of executioner did not appeal, but repulsive as it was it would not do for the boy to kill his savage brother-in-law. Lost sister and the savage were man and wife, even if married according to the Indian custom.

Nor would it do for a woman of Virginia to be redeemed to civilization with a red husband roaming at large. No. The fellow must die, and I had the nasty work to do. The glade was thickening with shadows, but the sunlight still marked the top of an elm and made glorious the zenith. When the light died from the heavens I would assassinate the man.

This would give him a scant hour, but a dozen or fifteen minutes of life could make small difference. Then again, once the dusk filled the glade my impassive victim would become alert and up to some of his devilish tricks. He did not change his position except as he turned his head to gaze fixedly at the western forest wall. One could imagine him to be ignorant of my presence.

"Where does Black Hoof lead his warriors?" I asked him.

Without deflecting his gaze he answered—

"Back to their homes on the Scioto."

"The white trader, the Pack-Horse-Man, spoke words that drive them back?"

It was either a trick of the dying light, or else I detected an almost imperceptible twitching of the grim lips. After a short pause he said:

"The Shawnees are not driven. They will pick up the end of the peace-belt. They will not drop it on the ground again. Tah-gah-jute (Logan) does not wish for war. He has taken ten scalps for every one taken from his people at Baker's house. He has covered the dead. The Pack-Horse-Man spoke wise words."

"This white woman? You know she must go back to her people."

Again the faint twitching of the lips. When he spoke it was to say:

"She can go where she will or where she is made to go. If she is taken to the white settlements she will run away and go back to the Scioto. Her people are red. After the French War, after Pontiac's War, it was the same. White prisoners were returned to the white people. Many of them escaped and came back to us."

His voice was calm and positive and my confidence in the girl's willingness to return to civilization was shaken. She had been as stolid as her red mate in my presence, but I had believed that nature would conquer her ten years of savagery once she was alone with her brother.

The light had left the top of the elm and the fleecy clouds overhead were no longer dazzling because of their borrowed splendor. I cocked my rifle. The savage folded his arms as he caught the sound, but his gaze toward the west never wavered. To nerve myself into shooting the fellow in cold blood I made myself think of the girl's terrible fate, and was succeeding rapidly when a light step sounded behind me and her low voice was saying:

"My brother is at the spring. You will find him there."

I ROSE and dropped the rifle into the hollow of my left arm and stared at her incredulously. It had happened before, the rebellion of white prisoners at quitting their captors. Yet the girl's refusal was astounding.

"You would not go with him?"

"I am here. I go to my people," she answered. "He is waiting for you. The squaws would laugh at him. He is very weak."

With an oath I whirled toward the Indian. Had he made a move or had he reflected her disdain with a smile, his white-red wife surely would have been a widow on the spot. But he had not shifted his position. To all appearances he was not even interested in his wife's return. And she too now ignored me, and busied herself in gathering up their few belongings and slinging them on her back. Then she went to him, and in disgust and rage I left them and sped through the darkening woods to the spring where I had first seen the imprints of her tiny moccasins.

Cousin was there, seated and his head bowed on his chest, a waiting victim for the first Indian scout who might happen along.

I dragged him to his feet and harshly said:

"Come! We must go. Your white sister is dead. Your search is ended. Your sister died in the raid on Keeney's Knob."

"My little sister," he whispered.

He went with me passively enough, and he did not speak until we had struck into the main trail of the Shawnees. Then he asked—

"You did not kill him?"

"No."

"It's best that way. There 're 'nough others. They'll pay for it."

I abandoned my plan of following the war-party farther and was only anxious to get my companion back to the protection of Howard's Creek. We followed the back-trail for a few miles and then were forced by the night to make a camp. I opened my supply of smoked meat and found a spring. I did not dare to risk a fire. But he would not eat. Only once did he speak that night, and that was to say:

"I must keep clear o' the settlements. If I don't I'll do as Ike Crabtree does, kill in sight o' the cabins."

In the morning he ate some of my food; not as if he were hungry but as if forcing himself to a disagreeable task. He seemed to be perfectly willing to go on with me, but he did not speak of the girl again.

When we drew near the creek he began to look about him. He at once recognized the surroundings and made a heroic effort to control himself. When we swung into the clearing there was nothing in his appearance to denote the terrible experience he had passed through.

Now that we were back I was beset by a fear, that the sight of Patricia in all her loveliness would be an overwhelming shock to his poor brain. It was with great relief that I got him to the Moulton cabin without his glimpsing Patsy.

"You can tell 'em if you want to. S'pose they'll l'arn it some time," he said to me as we reached the door and met Mrs. Moulton and her little girl. With that he passed inside and seated himself in a corner and bowed his head.

I drew Mrs. Moulton aside and briefly explained his great sorrow. With rich sympathy she stole into the cabin and began mothering him, patting his shoulders and stroking the long hair back from his wan face.

My own affairs became of small importance when measured beside this tragedy. I had no trepidation now in facing Patricia. I walked boldly to the Davis cabin and thrust my head in the door. Only Davis and his wife were there.

"Where are the Dales?" I bruskly asked.

"Gone," grunted Davis in disgust.

"Gone back home?" I eagerly asked.

"What do you think!" babbled Mrs. Davis. "Cousin Ericus has took that gal down toward the Clinch. He 'lows now he's goin' to keep the Injuns out of that valley—

"Good God! Why did you let them go?"

Davis snorted angrily, and exclaimed:

"Let 'em go! How ye goin' to stop her? 'Twas she that was bound to be movin' on. Just made her daddy go.

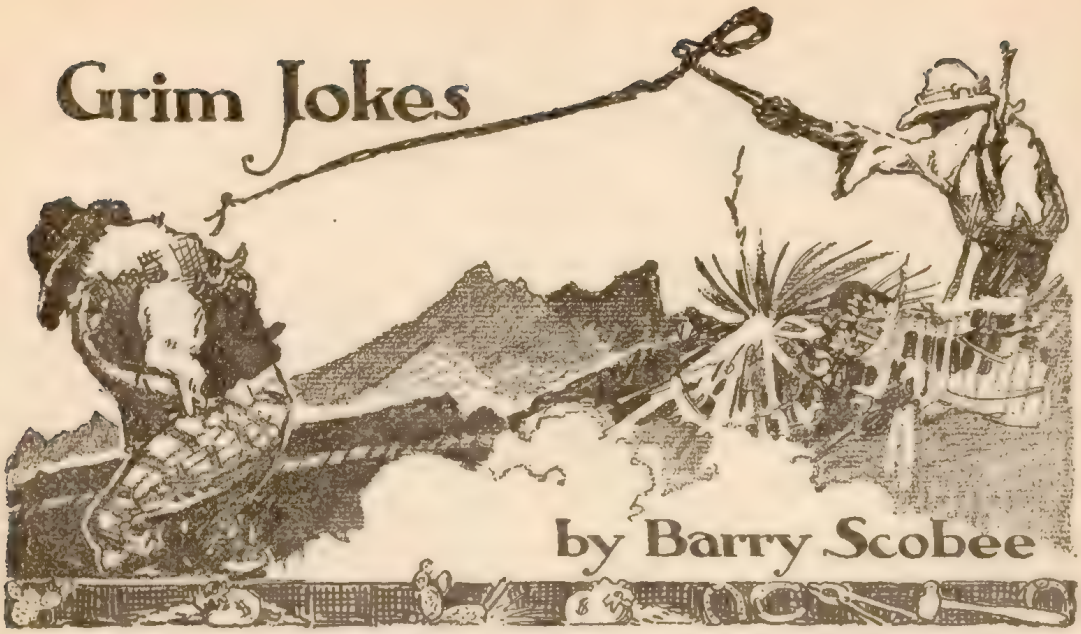
"When did they start?"

"Right after you lit out. Seems 's if th' gal couldn't git shut o' this creek quick 'nough."

I ran from the cabin to get my horse and start in immediate pursuit. By the time I reached the animal, well rested during my absence, I became more reasonable. After all Black Hoof was traveling north. There would be small chance of another band raiding down the Clinch for some time at least. I needed rest. Night travel would advance me but slowly. I would start early in the morning.

TO BE CONTINUED

Grim Jokes



by Barry Scobee

Author of "Gold of the Never Never," etc.

THIS is a story without heroes, to my way of thinking. As to the measure of villainy, you may weigh and conclude for yourself. To me, they were just two common, every-day, mine-run, hit-or-miss, take-it-or-leave-it Americans of the sort that can be chummed up with or sidestepped any day down in Mexico.

One of them, "Big Enough," or the "Big One," a blacksmith, was sometimes referred to as thick. In size he was almost a giant. You get a picture of him from those two words. All he asked of mankind was to be let alone in peace.

"M'lord" Jones, on the other hand, was more active in his associations. He was a mule-skinner and he swung a long and nasty blacksnake whip. He could clip the fire off a cigaret nine times out of ten at twenty feet or so with the lash and never crumple the paper.

Jones got his nickname the first morning he ever harnessed up a six-mule jerkline team in the Englishman's campyard at Santa Clara.

The skinner had mounted to the saddle of the wheel-mule and was swinging the six around in the thicket of other ore-wagons when he chanced to get the noses of his lead animals close to the little open-air smithy of the Big One. At this instant the Vulcan, all unconscious of the mules, dragged a horseshoe from the forge, laid it on the anvil and struck the white-hot metal a tentative blow. Sparks from the soft iron flew out in a flaming circle.

The nearer mule reared and jumped sidewise in a most mulish fashion, and there was something of a mix-up before Jones got their feet steady on the ground again. Then, sitting straight in his saddle, he bawled out to the Big One:

"Hi, you! What kind of a joke is this you're springin' here so early of a morning?"

"Go on!" protested Big Enough good-naturedly.

"What's that?" Jones snarled. "Who you tellin' to go on?"

He gathered up his whip, ready to throw. But as if, being a stranger, he wished to give fair warning to every donkey-maid in the lot, he raised his voice so no man thereabouts could fail to hear:

"Listen, you. There ain't nobody gets ahead of me with their tricks, see? You can't scare my mule and get away with it. Savvy?"

The Big One stood poised like a statue, his left hand gripping tongs and hot horseshoe on the anvil, the right holding aloft his big hammer the while he grinned placatingly. A simple man this smith was, also.

"I didn't aim to do that," he half-pleaded.

"There ain't never been anybody," Jones went on in his hard voice, "man er brute, male er female, that got ahead o' me."

He flung out the whip like a tongue of evil and wrapped the lash around the hammer-handle, jerked, and flung the hammer in a sweeping arc across the banked wagons and mules to the street a hundred and fifty feet away.

"Man er brute, male er female, they don't git ahead o' me," he spat.

Now near to the blacksmith stood the lime-juicer who owned the yard, a big, calm, chesty man with burnsides. In the silence that settled down on the lot for a moment, like a muffling snow, this man, barely removing the short-stemmed pipe from his lips, spoke in a rumbling voice such softly scornful words that a faint-hearted man would have been cut through.

"Ah, fawncy work, M'lord, fawncy!"

Quick as a wink Jones turned on him, flung the whip and plucked the big-bowled pipe from between the fingers and thumb and flung it after the hammer.

Then to top off the show he lifted a tuft of hair, with the lash, from the sleek hip of the Englishman's dun pony, standing by, and the gentle beast quivered, so that it was a good bet the owner would lift out his automatic and shoot. But he let the incident pass.

The nickname of "M'lord" took hold of Jones that morning like a good postage-stamp and stuck to him like a bad reputation.

But there was something in Jones that saved his hide from being hung up by some gunman or reckless knife-user, for he kept surviving.

It's a faith of mine that love for something will keep a man on his pegs, when without it he would be sent to the boneyard in double-quick time. I have in mind Jones' love for geology, rocks if you please. In view of the fate that overtook him it may appear that this belief is far-sighted, but after all it may be that his love for rocks did him the best turn of his wild career.

Jones had the habit that was second nature to most of the unwashed Mexicans of Chihuahua and Coahuila. He was forever watching the mountainous roadsides and trails and outcrops for ore-specimens, as he rode or hiked alone. Gold, silver, copper, no difference what; it was a habit of the eyes to fondle and judge every pebble and boulder.

ONE day a whisper swept across the country like a breeze from the north to the effect that Yankee cavalry was pursuing good Mexican soldier patriots in Chihuahua State and mowing them down with machine guns. The next day the rumor was strengthened by the flight of an airplane over the landscape.

It was an American bird-of-war. Everybody, Mexicans, Chinks, Japs and gringos, knew it could be no other.

The Mexicans and, to differentiate, a lot of pure-bred Yaqui Indians started an extermination-party on the Yanks who began to pop out of the towns and camps and hit for Texas like homing pigeons.

M'lord Jones roped a mule with his whip in the feedyard of the village where he chanced to be, threw on a couple of empty cement-sacks for a saddle, grabbed a canteen from a wagon-end and lit out eastward along toward night, just managing to stay ahead of the little dust-clouds that spent .30-30 bullets kicked up.

Because he was a good muleteer and a good man to pick trails at night, he got away. But he was at a loss where to go. Texas smelled good to his imagination, but there was a legal black mark against him there that made him regretfully shake his head at the thought. He kept riding through most of the night toward the east to get into empty and thereby safe country by morning.

When daylight slid across the semi-desert he selected a clump of blue mountain-peaks in the east and kept them between the mule's ears for a compass, and resolved to ride until he gained their base.

It got to be a big day—hotter than a tin roof in Yuma. A dust-dry cactus land where the heat-waves wiggled and the sand fogged up.

When it became plain that no pursuers were on his trail, he began to take his time and became engrossed in the mineral-formations on either hand—float that was mostly worthless shale, outcrops that sometimes resembled porphyry, and a copper or weather stain now and then.

He dropped down from the weary mule occasionally to examine scraps of float. He would gouge and whittle them and toss them down with an odd gentleness that was without animosity at their worthlessness. He loved rocks.

His entire equipment, besides the cement-sacks, was a canteen and the whip, which he had knotted for a kind of bridle.

For food, in the afternoon he got a jack-rabbit with a stone and later came to the adobe shack of an old *paisano*, where he bought his pockets full of eggs and his hat full of brown beans for a bent American dime. Thus he fared well.

The evening of the second day he arrived at the foot of the mountain-clump, the mule's knees bleeding from the spearing by cactus-spines, and found a goat-herder's shack. The graybeard had not seen company in weeks, and he talked endlessly. In the night he droned a story between shuck cigarets about a Yaqui chief making two trips into the clump of mountains and returning each time with a red handkerchief full of gold-nuggets.

Such yarns were old to Jones, but as usual this one gave him the nugget-itch. Next morning bright and early he got a tin pan, some beans and a little corn-meal and rode up into the silent heights.

He pecked and picked and peeped and peered and whittled at the rocks, ever looking for the color.

On the evening of the third day in the altitudes he made camp by a spring, on a grassy shelf where a few stunted pines offered firewood. He began to hunt around for a suitable fire-stone and came upon the basin of a little dry waterfall. In the bottom of it were a lot of pebbles, covered with a film of dry mud. He pecked at one of the pebbles, then swooped into them, grabbing, gasping, jabbering.

For the pebbles were gold-nuggets.

He got up and stumbled around, holding his head with both hands, kicking the toes of his

high laced boots against boulders to convince himself he was awake, and finally regained his equilibrium. He piled the nuggets and estimated there were forty pounds. He emptied the bean-bag and put the gold into it.

Supper consisted of boiled beans, corn pone and an upland quail that he had lassoed with his whip. Afterward he sat by a snappy fire in the thin, crisp, mountain atmosphere and cast about in his thoughts as to his future proceedings. All at once he tensed with a new thought:

"Well I'll be jiggered! Where's my wits been? I can go back to Texas now."

And there flashed through his thoughts the memory of that old crime—once he had smuggled three Chinamen across into the United States—for which a Federal judge had fined him one thousand dollars. On the way to the county jail in San Antonio where Federal prisoners were kept frequently, he escaped.

"By heck!" he ran on. "I'll pay that fine now, and I'll buy me a place for a polo-farm out on the Bandera road from San Anton', and I'll marry me some old gal that ain't found a man yet, and have regular home-made eats and kids to work. No jail for me. I'm goin' back to the States and paint 'em red! Hi, donk, hear that?"

He went out into the darkness away from the fire and slapped the mule on the sides and wooled its muzzle.

"Old boy, you got to get me and that yellow stuff to the Grande, savvy? You got to get us past the prowlin' Mex soldiers like we was thin air, see?"

And the mule, happy and about full of grass, sighed long and deep. Then with M'lord back at the fire he resumed his grazing.

Jones didn't sleep so well, what with his planning over the gold, like a maid on her wedding eve. Far beyond midnight, by the moon, he sat up with a start, as if a shot had awakened him. He listened. It dawned on him that the munching of the mule at the grass had stopped. He fancied the big fellow out there somewhere with cocked, listening ears.

Then unmistakably a shot sounded a long way off.

Jones' first thought was of Mexican soldiers, or ruffians of some sort. His second thought was to escape before day came and get the gold to safety. He began to circle the fire-site in search of the mule, which he fancied was standing asleep near by.

He circled farther and farther without finding the animal, all the time growing frantic, for day began to come on as certain as the tide. But no mule moved among the crags, and when day was full flush across the peaks there was still no saddle-animal. But by the light Jones picked up the trail of the little hoofs and followed.

A mile distant the tracks dropped down into an arroyo, and when he started to descend after them he almost stepped into a nest of gray, warm ashes under the bank. Near by was the carcass of the mule. A square of hide had been stripped off the hind quarter and a chunk of meat removed. But no man was about.

M'lord set out for his camp and the gold at a trot, for the nuggets had been left in the cement-sack by the fire when he started searching for the mule.

AS HE drew near his heart fell, for a man was squatting by the cold ashes clawing through the nuggets. M'lord picked up a heavy rock and advanced, but when he was close enough to sling the weight, the man looked up.

He was Big Enough, the smith, the near giant.

He got to his feet, a good-natured expression over him.

"You're Jones," he said. "I'm Barley."

Jones, unbending, looked around him. The man carried a canteen, a moist roll of mule's skin, and an automatic pistol and cartridges on a belt. They were in a heap, where he had dropped them.

"What you doing here?" M'lord demanded vexedly.

"They run me out down below."

"How about my mule?" Jones gritted belligerently.

"By golly! Was he your'n? Say— I shot him. I thought he was a bear in the dark."

He shoved fingers under his wide hat and scratched his head ruefully.

"I sure am regretful, Jones."

M'lord's cheeks slowly turned a black red, like a Bing cherry. He squatted and put the nuggets back into the sack without speaking. Then he tied the mouth with a buckskin thong; he tied the middle also, dividing the golden rocks into the ends of the bag to make it easy to carry. He closed the bean-pouch too and filled the two canteens, a storm gathering within him all the time.

"What's in that?" he asked, pointing to the fresh hide.

"A chunk of mule meat," Big Enough answered. "I thought——"

"This gun loaded?" Jones took up the pistol.

"Five or six ca'tridges in it."

Jones laid the things down together, except the pistol. He looked Barley up and down with smoldering eyes. Barley, with a neck like a bull and shoulders like hams, fidgeted under the hot scrutiny. All at once Jones brightened.

"How'd you come here?" he asked.

"Horseback——"

"Where's the horse?"

"Back down below. Split hoof and petered out."

M'lord darkened again.

"By the gods," he said, "you'd make a horse!"

"Sure," the Big One acquiesced. "What'll you pay me to lug your stuff up?" He laughed lightly.

"Up?" snarled Jones. "I ain't going up. Listen here, you!

"You know me. Nobody ever got ahead of me, man er brute, male er female."

"Shucks!" expostulated Barley. "What's eatin' on ye?"

"Listen. I had a mule. It would 'a' packed this gold to the river. You shot him. Now you'll pack this stuff to the Rio Grande. You'll be my mule. And you won't be paid."

Barley lifted off his hat and scratched his head, his jaw hanging lax.

"I wasn't aimin' to go north," he said at last. "I come up here till it blows over down in the camps, a-aimin' to prospect around a little."

"Load up this stuff!" Jones barked.

"Shucks, Jonesy. Let's go up the ravine and hunt for the mother lode." Barley pointed to the basin a few feet away where obviously the stuff had been taken out. "I'll lug the stuff up."

M'lord stooped and took up the whip by its shiny hickory handle and carried it back over the right shoulder.

"Take that stuff," he ordered, "er I'll cut you to ribbons. And I'll shoot you if you push me."

Jones saw Barley's face flush stubbornly, and he flung the hissing blacksnake whip without further warning or waiting.

A white spot, then a rush of blood, appeared on Barley's left cheek. Barley's eyes popped open, scared. His tongue went to the cheek inside and slipped through.

"Jonesy," he said in awe, "you've snapped a hole through my cheek."

"I'll burn you to a cinder if you don't pick that stuff up and hit out," M'lord retorted, brittle as glass.

Barley stepped forward, paused a moment, glaring, then sprang at Jones with a bull's bellow. At the same instant, his face as grim as rock, Jones sprang back yelling:

"Stay back! Stay back! I'll shoot!"

There was still room, and he threw the lash into Barley's face. Barley grunted and put up his hands to save his eyes from the hissing serpent that now flew back and forth like light.

"Surrender! Surrender!" shouted M'lord.

Barley ran backward, and as the lash pursued him he tried to seize it in his bare hands. In an instant a long, red spurting gash—a ribbon of red—appeared across Barley's forehead.

"Now you'll stop!" Jones flung out.

But Barley kept coming, the blood not yet blinding him. He half-shielded his face with his bare forearms. Jones began to slash at them, and blood began to run. In their jumping about they kicked up stones with their hob-nailed boots. They raised a choking fog of dust. When M'lord felt he could no longer breathe in it, Barley tripped over the sack of gold and went down sprawling. Jones laid the whip on him without human mercy.

The Big One, blinded, writhed and screamed like a man who has sawed into a bee-tree and is unable to escape from the thousands of bees.

A half-hour later, under the threats of Jones, Barley set out northward like a pack-horse. M'lord kept well back from him to be safe from any sudden lunge on the giant's part. The Big One carried the bag of nuggets, the cornmeal and steaks, the two canteens and the tin pan for the corn pones.

Barley staggered and cringed and dripped blood and spat blood and whimpered.

Jones cracked his whip like a circus-ringmaster.

They took their way along the rim of the shelf, and the mesa lay below them, miles without end. Off toward the horizon in the northwest Jones made out a pillar of sun-dust, and far, far to the north two more.

"Know what them toadstools is, Big One?" he demanded.

"Lemme go," whimpered Barley. "Lemme go. I'm ruined. I want some salve."

"Them, Big One, is Mex soldiers travelin' to some rondyvoo, er bandits on the rampage and layin' for gringos like us. But—" and M'lord's face went grim and relentless—"they ain't going to get this gold. No they ain't."

Barley probably didn't hear the meaning, only the harsh tone, for he shrank like a horse when it sees the whip raised.

He was broken; broken as a bronco in a corral is broken by a bunch of men; as a wild and stubborn man in prison is broken by guards with clubs.

Toward noon he spoke briefly, and because of his swollen and punctured cheek that bubbled bloody bubbles when he spoke, he slid the words from one side of his twisting mouth:

"Noon. Rest."

"Rest!" M'lord sneered. "You don't rest till night. You killed my mule and you'll travel like he would."

"Wait till you get asleep, Jones," Barley threatened in a sudden flare. "Don't think you can run this very long."

For answer M'lord cracked the lash just barely against the tender skin of Barley's back, through the shirt, but with such stinging pain that the big fellow groaned and tried to twist away from the invisible hurt.

"When there's any sleeping, Big One, you'll

be so run down from bein' a mule you'll not be sleeping—you'll be unconscious. Savvy?"

Barley did not answer. All at once M'lord exploded in a blast of laughter, as a triumphant viking might have done.

"He-he-he! A man for a mule!" he gloated. "What a joke! What a joke!"

It became very hot. Not a fleecy cloud appeared in all the blue sky to get between the sun and them and mellow the hard, hot rays. But Jones was not downhearted. Throughout the afternoon he gloated and chuckled and went on.

"What a joke, what a joke!" he kept saying. "A man for a pack-mule. Nobody ever gets ahead o' me."

"Giggle your head off!" the Big One flared once, just once. "You can afford to be drunk on air."

He shrugged his huge left shoulder that bore the sack of nuggets. Jones, from habit now, flung out the whip and made Barley groan.

"Sure," Jones agreed, with a world of meaning. "I can afford to laugh. They's years of easy living in that sack you're luggin' for me. Gold! Gold!"

He smacked his lips in anticipation. He was mad over gold.

And for three mad, heat-stricken days, hunting for water, dodging mushrooms of dust that marked riding men, whipping, chuckling, groaning from a lacerated body, they kept on without a change between the two. At night the thin and restless wind of the mesa ate through their sweaty garments like acid and made rest misery.

It was like a journey in a nightmare.

TOWARD noon of the fourth day they came suddenly to a strip of black porous lava-rock—light cinders. Off to the left across the scattered mesquite-clumps was a low hill that, Jones decided, would afford a view of the country and show him perhaps how to dodge any men riding across—all men were to be avoided so long as the bag of gold remained in Mexican territory.

"Hi, Big One," he called. "You go on straight across this light rock, hear? I'll hurry on to that hill and meet you on the other side. Savvy?"

Barley paused, faced around, swayed dizzily. Jones stopped abruptly to keep from getting too close. For he never got within reach of the ham-like hands. Once Barley had got a rock, and when M'lord ventured fairly near, had flung it. Jones shot at him with the pistol, grazing his neck.

Barley never tried that trick again.

Now, Big Enough uncorked a canteen and lifting it with hands that shook, drank a few swallows.

"Down! Down with it!" bellowed M'lord.

It was obvious that Barley brought the canteen away by sheer will-power. Jones watched to keep him from overdrinking. A brilliant thought seized him.

"I'll take the canteens with me. Drop 'em off."

Barley obeyed stupidly. He seemed to be near the end of his tether. He was swollen wherever the skin was uncovered, his arms, hands, neck, face. Especially was his face swollen, and bloody—for he had had no chance to wash—and was blackened with scabs. The hole in his cheek was scabbed over. The beard had grown stiff on his face. He scarcely would have passed for a human being in an exhibit of men.

M'lord took up the canteen and headed for the hill, with a parting warning for Barley to plod on and meet him on the other side.

Nothing alarming showed up from the hill, so M'lord lost no time in starting back to the rendezvous. Though he was hard hit by the journey also, yet the intoxication of the gold was holding him up with the incentive to get to Texas soil. No day yet had seemed so promising. Surely by the next day they would find the Rio Grande.

"What a joke," he chuckled. "What a yarn to tell the kids when I'm an old man. A man for a mule. Oh boy, nobody gets ahead o' me—man er brute, male er female—er God, even!"

WHEN he arrived at the spot where Barley should be, the giant was not there. He called. No answer.

"Don't hide from me," he shouted. "I'll pick the meat off o' your bones when I find yuh."

No living thing but a buzzard flying high was in sight over all that desert of heat and sun.

Panic seized M'lord. He began to run about, looking into all the mesquite-clumps and shouting. In two minutes or so he rushed up to a larger bunch of the greenery than before and came face to face with Barley.

Barley sat there, looking up at his master in calm contempt.

"Why didn't yuh answer me?" M'lord demanded, backing off to safety.

"You got uneasy about me, didn't you?" Barley made answer.

He flicked the hint of a derisive grin up at his boss.

They got under way in silence. But they had not traversed a hundred feet when Jones recognized that there was something different about the Big One. New life was in his every movement.

All at once Barley threw back his head and roared with laughter. It made chills run along Jones' spine.

"What's the matter there?" M'lord barked.

For a little Barley kept on with his great

guffaw. His strange mirth would abate, like a high wind, to a chuckle of a breeze, then rise again and fall.

Jones was afraid. He felt for the automatic pistol to assure himself.

"—— fire!" he muttered.

His hand forgot the pistol-butt and sought the hickory handle of the blacksnake.

"You want to know what's the matter with me?" Barley called back over his right shoulder in a lopped-mouth manner.

M'lord raked him from head to foot but could see no suddenly acquired weapon, could see nothing to account for the change. The nugget-bag, the canteens, the palmful of meal were all secure.

"I'll tell you," Barley went on, checking a fit of chuckling. "I got a joke too."

"Eh? What's that?"

"I've got a joke too. Yeah. You've got one, 'A man a mule.' He-he-he! My joke is worth a dozen o' your jokes."

"What is it?"

"That's be telling, Jonesy."

"Well, spring it!"

"Nothing doing."

"Ain't your hide full enough of holes?"

"Nothing doing."

M'lord's temper began to crisp like bacon in a skillet. He cut at the Big One, bringing blood along one side of the bull-neck. The smith stepped out faster but did not cringe or whimper. Instead he looked back at his tormentor and laughed.

Jones was infuriated. He began to cut back and forth with the wicked whip. At first Barley held himself to a steady walk, laughing like a martyr to show disdain. Then he broke into a trot that somehow was awful; for all the time he tried to slow to a walk and could not, under the burning leather-end.

And all the time he laughed.

After a while Jones quit. An hour later, the Big One still chuckling, the master called out—

"What the —— has got into you, anyhow?"

" A joke," Barley answered soberly.

"By Heavens, I'll——"

But a semblance of common sense came to Jones, and in the end he decided that the best way not to let Barley get ahead was to go on with his own joke. He had learned that a man can be broken quicker by being laughed at than by being sworn at. So back and forth, hour after torrid hour, they bandied their wicked taunting:

Barley: "Oh, Jonesy, the joke I've got on you! Haw-haw-haw!"

Jones: "What a joke! What a joke! A man for a mule!"

But Jones wondered and wondered what Barley's joke was. Yet in a way he was eminently satisfied, for Barley was still the beast of burden, carrying the heavy bag, first on one shoulder, then the other, toward Texas and safety.

And Jones, as night came on, drove the weary and plodding giant without mercy, lashing, lashing, lashing. Drove him into the dusk and through the darkness of midnight and on toward the morning in a mighty effort to reach the Rio Grande.

At sunrise Barley was weak from the trickling loss of blood and a giggling automaton from the lash. But Jones pushed on.

SOMEHOW they gained the river. When they had fallen on their faces and drunk like hounded deer and sat back, Barley began his laughing again, only now it was more sensible, and urgent. Jones shouldered the cement-bag, though he was so weary that he staggered, and waded across to the Texas shore, parting without even a thank you or a good-by to his beast of burden.

Still more weary from the tugging of the breast-deep water which had carried him somewhat down-stream, Jones sat down on the sandy bank to pant.

In a moment two men came from out of the mesquite brush near by, where it seemed to Jones they had been waiting.

One wore a high hat, riding-boots, carried a revolver at his belt and swung a rifle in the crook of one arm. The other man was a United States cavalryman. He was armed with a heavy automatic.

"Hello, bo," said the soldier.

"You look tuckered out," said the civilian mildly.

At first flush Jones was uneasy about his gold.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"Who, me? Oh, I'm just a ranger. You-all don't happen to have some contraband in that there bag, do you?"

"Any 'rum' contraband?" amended the soldier, grinning.

Jones smiled a sort of crooked, painful smile.

"It would have been contraband on the other side o' this sewer," he said. "The Mexes would 'a' charged quite a right smart to let me off."

He laughed shortly at his attempted wit. He noted with curiosity that Barley, on the other side, had moved a little way down-stream to be even with them. He was a stone's throw away, looking, listening.

The two men, whose daily work it was to let the Mexicans know the meaning of "U. S." and to guard against the approach of enemies and eavesdroppers of a spying and foreign character, stood and looked down at Jones, patient, calm, questioningly.

"I got gold in that sack," said Jones. "Reckon it ain't contraband."

"Gold?"

The ranger's eyes popped open.

"How'd you get that way?" asked the soldier skeptically.

"Listen," Jones said. "I got this sack full of nuggets 'way down in Mexico, and I said they wasn't anything in the earth or under it or over it that could keep me from gettin' this stuff to the safe side o' the Rio Grande."

"You must of loved that gold awful bad," the ranger opined.

"I did, mister. I been out of this United States six years. If I had come back I would have been put in jail for maybe a coupla years."

"What's that?"

"Yes. Because I didn't have any money. I got fined a thousand bucks by Uncle Sam's judge at San Anton' and I escaped without payin' it. I been wanting to get back, ranger. I want to pay that fine. I'm aching right now for you two gents to arrest me and take me to the nearest bank and the nearest jail and lock me up and send me down to San Anton'. I want your protection for this gold and for me."

"You ain't kiddin' us?" asked the soldier, squatting down and staring at the sack.

"No, sure I ain't," Jones assured.

He drew the yellow, dusty cement-sack between his spread-out knees and began to pluck at the knot of the middle string. On the instant Barley, across the water, broke out with his terrible laughter.

"Who's your friend?" asked the ranger. "And why don't he come across?"

"He looks funny from here," the soldier commented. "And laughs funny."

"Him?" Jones evaded temporarily.

He threw the middle string aside and shook the contents together at the front of the sack so they could all be dumped out together. Then he began to untie the string at the mouth of the bag.

The laughter on the other side of the river grew more ecstatic. His chuckling grew to a senseless chattering, high-noted, awful cackling of mirth.

Jones threw aside the string from the mouth and took the back corners of the bag between thumbs and fingers to tilt it up.

"That feller across the river," he said. "I had a time with him, But nobody ever got ahead o' me—man er brute, male er female—er God, even. Now watch the yellow boys roll out!"

He began to tug gently at the sack, until one more movement would cause the contents to spill. Then he flicked it, so that the stuff inside came out in a heap.

As the three stared at the heap, the laughter on the other side came across to them very clear.

Instead of nuggets from the bag, there lay a little pile of black porous lava-rock.

The Worm that Turned

This is an Off-The-Trail story. See second Contents page.

by A. W. Callisen

THE yellow water of the river clucked and gurgled under the stern of the sampan. It was a dull rainy day, warm and sodden, but to Tong it seemed full of sunshine, for he had at last perfected his trap to catch water-rats, on which he had worked so long.

The trap hung by a cord from the stern window, which was but a few inches above the surface of the water. His view was not comprehensive. He could see only the red hull of a neighboring sampan, bruised and shabby, and a small stretch of yellow swirling river.

Presently a fat rat approached breasting the

current and pushing little rings of water before her with her whiskers. The beady eyes shone and the black nose wiggled, but after a moment she disappeared.

Tong waited with the Chinese patience born of generations of dull submission. Minutes passed, a quarter of an hour—then a sharp jerk at the line.

Tong drew it in swiftly hand over hand while the rat bit and clawed with such fierceness that, had it equaled a dog in size, it would have been more formidable than a lion. But Tong without excitement seized a split bamboo and, pinning the rat by the neck, released it from the trap.

He then leisurely slew and skinned it, the thought of the coming feast causing the water to run in his mouth, for well he knew that a fat water-rat slowly roasted over a charcoal fire furnished a luscious dish. And then it was meat. Months had passed since Tong had tasted that luxury.

Occasionally indeed a dead dog floated bumpingly against the algæ-covered sides of the sampan. That was always a red-letter day, provided the dog had not drifted about all too long; and Tong never failed to invite his two friends, the rice-cook and the porter, as well as the owner of the sampan, not that he loved the latter, but to propitiate the surly temper of the fat Tiger, who looked with a jealous eye on Tong's trapping and fishing.

For a day or two the old man was soothed and docile, but then the luscious feast was forgotten, and Tong carefully circumnavigated him in wide curves. Had the fat Tiger been able to carry out his will he assuredly would have driven him from the sampan—but there was the hitch, for Tong had a hard-and-fast lease for ninety-nine years of the little back cabin, scarcely eight feet by four, and the rent was paid in advance to the very end.

And where had Tong acquired such unheard-of wealth? He had once for a short period been the servant of a White Devil, had waited on him, run his errands and shaved him. He still thought in bitter moments of that shameless white throat, lean and long, with the knobby Adam's apple that slid up and down without apparent cause.

Had he only felt then as he did now the deft razor might by a sharp twist have done swift execution; and a pleasing shudder passed through his frame as he pictured the red blood squirting forth over the white napkin. But at that time hatred had not yet entered his heart.

One day when his master was absent he had taken a golden scarf-pin to the street door to show his friend the rice-cook; only to show it, not to steal it. It represented a little horse with diamond eyes and appeared a miracle to his inexperienced mind.

Just at that moment his master returned from a canter and, catching him in the very act, fell upon him mercilessly with his riding-whip, striking him again and again over his face and shoulders. Tong dropped the fatal scarf-pin and fled in terror.

He sat brooding all day among some lumber by the riverside, smarting still under the lashes, his left eye inflamed and burning, but at night he crept silently to his room over the stable and, seizing his few belongings and accumulated wages carefully secreted in his mattress, stole softly away never to return.

Since then he had lived on the sampan. His eye grew worse and worse, causing him excruciating agony, and finally when the pain decreased the sight was gone. That was however not of so great consequence, for he still had his right eye, and that became large and luminous and quite lighted up his otherwise homely and expressionless face.

And then Tong had a great consolation, for had he not a home? How many thousands—yea, millions—of his fellow countrymen had no place to rest their weary heads save where chance might direct! And the home was safe and he could laugh in glee at the fat Tiger when the latter spat contemptuously as he passed, for his lease, written in red and black characters on a narrow strip of rice-paper, lay with many similar documents under a huge porcelain slab in the Temple of the Seven Winds and the great Buddha guarded it in person with eyes fixed perpetually thereon.

When not engaged in trapping water-rats or fishing for little yellow eels which fed on the refuse of the river, Tong usually spent the day sauntering along its banks watching the junks and sampans slipping down with the muddy current and, like *Mr. Micawber*, of whom he had never heard, waiting for something to turn up.

Occasionally the yellow-gray monotony was broken by a monstrous fireship of the White Devils, decked with flags and streamers, that cast out volumes of black smoke and churned the water with its paddles till every sampan for half a mile bumped and ground its neighbor. When it had passed on ruthlessly, leaving a wake like a dragon's tail streaked with bubbling foam, the discolored rollers roared along the shore eating into the clay banks and turning everything within reach topsy-turvy.

Tong stared with an evil eye at the retreating monster and thought of the many white throats on board, male and female, while his fingers itched to wield his razor among them.

THE days of Tong's life were very similar. It never occurred to him to have desires or wishes but of the most elementary sort, his narrow subconsciousness having just room for eating, drinking and sleeping. In all else he melted into the vast mass of

untold millions to whom a handful of rice and a corner to lie down in constituted existence.

If a black fireship, huge and bulky, chanced to arrive at the coal-yards, Tong swiftly betook himself there also. For hours he would then stand patiently with hundreds of his fellows, up to his ankles in the black coaly mud, with the same stolid endurance he had displayed in trapping water-rats from the sampan's back window.

More often than not after hours of waiting he was turned away; but it also happened occasionally that a dirty canvas bag and a brass check with a number were tossed to him, and then he staggered innumerable times with the heavy loaded sack from the coal-heap over a gang-plank to the steamship, knees bent, chest heaving, while the sweat made runnels on his coal-stained cheeks and forehead. Once on board the load was dumped into the insatiable maw of the monster and with a lightened sack he swiftly ran back over another gang-plank only to begin again.

He had just finished a loading, but the day was still young. He still panted, and his mouth and nostrils were filled with coaldust, but the few brass coins earned were clutched tightly in his grimy palm—surely a drop of something to drink, a little rice-brandy or *tooling*, would be well.

As he entered the small dram-shop behind the theater his eye lighted on his two intimates—Houling the porter, a man of middle age, broad of shoulder, short of legs, and Kushan, the rice-cook, a thin, haggard Chinaman with slits of eyes and an unusually long pigtail. They squatted on the ground each with a little green bowl of rice-brandy before him, and Tong joined them in their crouching posture just as he was, drenched in sweat and black with coal-dust.

The tiny room was filled with people back to back, shoulder to shoulder, so that the attendant could scarcely wend his tortuous way without treading on them, while over all rested like a warm haze the reek of humanity and liquor—a curious smell like the fumes of alcohol in a copper kettle.

The street without, a glimpse of which was revealed through the half-open door, seemed equally filled with swarming humanity which pressed and shoved in both directions; and if for an instant a gap occurred it was quickly filled by another human body; people, people, people—always people!

A curious noise cooked and brooded in this mass; a hum, a clatter, punctuated by piping cries which reminded one of the screams of sea-birds.

The porter gazed at Tong's grimy countenance and asked—

"The White Devils have again eaten coal?"

"Yes," rejoined Tong laconically.

The conversation lapsed and the three returned to their material enjoyment while the clatter and cries from the street continued to penetrate through the half-open door.

After ten minutes of silent stolidity the rice-cook volunteered—

"The White Devils have again discovered coal in the mountains near Fooling." And he spat on the floor in wrath.

His companions regarded him in silence; after a while he added:

"They need coolies; the governor of the province has proclaimed it. The governor always helps the White Devils."

"Who would go?" asked Tong. "In the mountains are only robbers, tigers and demons. It is unsafe."

Kushan slowly nodded his head up and down like an idol.

"But they pay, and pay well."

"You will come to grief if you try it," said Tong. "The mountain spirits are evil; you will lose your ears or eyesight."

Houling the porter regarded Tong with an irritated look.

"This is nothing for a rich man like you," he cried.

What right had he to interfere with advice to such as they; he who had a roof over his head every night, and so was immeasurably their superior in wealth? As soon as it fell dark they sought some corner to rest in, some spot where they would not be driven away before the night was half over.

They and countless millions slept in dust-heaps, on the steps of temples, with a weary arm stretched under the head for a pillow, a tatter of matting or a bit of rag drawn over the face and eyes, or sometimes under an old bridge amid slimy rat-infested piles. There were thousands who had never passed a night under a roof—who had been born in the open. Tong indeed!

But presently the porter's brow cleared and slowly a smile, or rather a broad grin, spread over his yellow countenance, showing his black stumps of teeth in all their ugliness. The rice-cook gazed at him in amazement—they seldom smiled—and asked the cause of his merriment; but Tong, following the course of the previously suggested idea, interrupted:

"The White Devils bore holes in the earth and then suck her life-blood through tubes. They build wagons which run on iron roads and drag away her bowels. And when all is gone, used up, dry, they return to their homes across the sea, rich through the sweat of the coolie! All for them, nothing for us!"

"Yes, and they will not even allow us to live or work in their country," cried Kushan. "Ask Loo-chang; he has been in the land of the White Devils. And yet they pay good money," he added with a sigh.

"Yes, they have their uses after all," said the porter, still grinning. "What would you say now if I told you I was about to buy a sampan of my own?"

And as his companions gazed at him in silent wonder he continued:

"Yes, a fine new sampan with an awning of green and yellow matting; behind, a little garden on the deck, and in front a scarlet dragon whose imag is reflected in the water."

His companions continued to stare in wonder, secretly fearing for his reason; and as the little green bowls were long since empty they followed him into the street, too astonished even to question.

Houling however presently drew them into an alleyway with mysterious nods and signs. Here two jutting wooden walls formed an angle into which he pushed his friends, at the same time effectually shutting out all view from the street with his broad back; and diving into his loin-cloth he produced a round shining object like a small cheese, only it was glittering gold and ticked gently.

To the end of this object was attached a heavy chain also of gold and at the end of that on a shorter chain dangled a seal, a key and a little golden fish. It was a watch, the watch of a White Devil!

"My sampan," laughed Houling, showing his teeth.

Then he again secreted the strange object in his loin-cloth and trotted off with the short stiff strides of a porter. At the mouth of the alley he once more faced about and cried—

"When Kushan returns from the mountains with a bag of money he can lodge on my sampan."

THE two friends remained staring at each other some moments longer, their hearts filled with envy; then the rice-cook, squinting at the sun's position through his slits of eyes, considered it time to resume the cares of his occupation, so they sauntered down the main thoroughfare to his place of business. This consisted of a rough fireplace of brick built directly in the road with a fine disregard for traffic, together with an old iron kettle, now upside down with legs pointing heavenward to indicate that for the present at least customers might look elsewhere.

This kettle, together with the ragged and threadbare clothes on his back, constituted the sum total of Kushan's worldly possessions; but even then he cooked the rice for those who were still poorer and had not even a pot to cook in. When absent for any cause, the umbrella-mender, who occupied a tiny shed on the corner, kept an eye on the precious kettle, a service which was reciprocated on the part of the rice-cook by an eye on the umbrella-stand whenever its owner temporarily betook himself elsewhere.

Here the two separated. Tong leisurely pursuing his way through the jostling, pushing throng. Was it the rice-brandy or the bright sunshine that made his head so clear, his thought so nimble—usually so sluggish?

He felt exalted, lifted up as it were, and though a man of puny stature he seemed imbued with the strength of a giant. Something was working within him, seeking for expression, action, he knew not what.

His thoughts returned to the doings of the White Devils and a vague feeling of resentment took possession of him and absorbed him so that he wandered as if in a dream.

Suddenly he felt a violent push, and a volume of curses was showered upon him. He had unwittingly collided with a stout European clothed in spotless flannel—alas, no longer spotless, for a great smudge of grimy coal-dust befouled its once immaculate surface.

Tong had in all his thirty years been bred in dumb submission, submission to all above him, but doubly, trebly so to the white strangers. And yet now that he stood confronted by the irate and much feared gentleman something new quickened and stirred within him. He held his ground and answered back, yea, even cursed glibly in return.

It would be difficult to say which of the two was more amazed at this unexpected resistance. But the stout gentleman, now furious at such unheard-of impudence, raised his cane to strike; yet his intention came to naught, for there was that in Tong's blazing eye which bade discretion.

The throng, which had stood still in wonder for an instant, presently moved on again, and Tong was quickly swept out of sight of the irate one, his feeling of strength and independence still further stimulated by the encounter.

He had not held his ground through any will of his own, for he possessed none, but prompted by some alien force which controlled and dominated his personality. As he passed slowly along his attention was for a moment diverted by a street conjurer who stood on a small platform and entertained a gaping crowd.

He was fantastically dressed, his face hidden by a hideous red mask, giving him the appearance of a demon or evil spirit, and as Tong gazed, it suddenly flashed upon him that this was "Ancestor Day" and a proper observation thereof was due to ghosts of the departed.

He still possessed a few brass coins, the wage of his morning's labor, and with these he wended his steps toward the Temple of the Seven Winds. He ascended the stairway and slipped into the interior, dark at any hour but doubly so after the bright sunshine without.

On the walls he could just discern the glint of gold from the numerous ancestral portraits of the rich. Tong possessed no ancestral painting; the ghosts of his forebears, together with ten thousand other spirits, dwelt in the park

recesses of the temple, squatted beneath the pillars or floated about under the blackened rafters.

In the far background, illuminated by a ray of light falling from above, sat the great Buddha placid, serene, the calm of eternity upon his brow, his unwinking gaze still fastened on the vault at his feet which hid Tong's treasure. The mighty god himself shielded him from harm; he was safe; the fat Tiger could never drive him from his home on the sampan.

He leisurely approached a little table behind which stood a priest dispensing joss-sticks. He laid down a coin and received a little bundle of twelve, aromatic with camphor and resin, and was on the point of lighting them at the ever-burning taper supplied for the purpose, when suddenly his jaw fell and a cold sensation struck his heart and almost robbed him of his breath.

For behold, the porcelain slab was gone and a circular brick-lined recess was revealed to his terrified gaze, empty and void! What could it mean?

The priest followed his eye and pointing black finger.

"My son, hast thou intrusted aught to the watchful care of our mighty Buddha?" he asked.

Tong assented in a choking voice.

"The servants of the court have removed all—have robbed the temple," said the priest bitterly. "Those who wish their documents renewed must apply to the judge and pay a new fee. The priests no longer have control."

"Who has done this?" cried Tong fiercely. "The White Devils?"

"The viceroy issued the command," returned the priest, "but surely the White Devils are to blame in the end. What is it thou hast lost, my son?"

"A lease that secured me a home for ninety-nine years."

"Then renew it."

"I can not. The fat Tiger would demand money. I have none. He surely will cast me out."

"The White Devils are at the bottom of all our ills," said the priest. "They should be hanged up over the temple gate by their entrails."

And he turned to serve a new customer.

FOR a long time Tong stood rooted to the spot; then he mechanically lighted his joss-sticks and set them in a row, fastening them with a little wax to a large greasy stone on which many similar offerings were already sending upward little votive pig-tails of aromatic vapor. He dropped down among the silent worshipers, but his thoughts were elsewhere.

Occasionally his restless eye caught the glint of gold from the ancestral portraits. It suggested the shining gleam of the watch of his friend the porter.

Such a little treasure represented an entire sampan and he shuddered to think how the fat Tiger would spit at him and drive him off should he attempt to approach his comfortable little cabin. How snug it seemed now it was lost; and then his precious trap and the water-rats!

That the Tiger might not be aware of his loss never entered his poor head. He regarded himself already as belonging to the huge army of the homeless, having to slink about in the cold, damp darkness seeking a corner to lie down in; and, alas, he well knew that every spot of vantage was already secured and would be stoutly defended by its occupant.

An endless vista, sad and gray, presented itself to his mental vision—not a ray of light anywhere. His eye sought his smoking joss-sticks.

One of them had fallen over and become extinguished—a bad omen surely, one fitting the present occasion. Thus the yellow race fell and expired while the White Devils triumphed!

But could it not be resurrected and set on high again even as he relighted and replaced his taper? Once more Tong felt the expansion of his brain, the tingle and exaltation of the morning. His muscles became tense and he raised his fists above his head and shook them at an unseen enemy.

When he glanced about him at his praying fellows he saw with enlightened eyes the lines of care and sorrow in their grimy faces, the bent backs, the hollow eyes, the emaciated limbs. Each of these men had a secret care, some pitiful right he feared to lose, the distress for his daily bread, or one of the countless sorrows which bowed down his unfortunate countrymen.

Why had not the ghosts of their ancestors who lurked in the shadows of the temple seized these evil-doers and torn them to shreds? Surely there must be among them very ancient, strong fat ghosts, spirits of the heroes of old, doughty knights and dragon-slayers! It would be but a trifle for such as these; and he thought of the downtrodden starving millions who suffered and died, unwept for and unavenged.

His blood coursed though his veins like fire and hammered in his pulses. He sprang up and rushed from the temple—whither he knew not—but presently, finding himself again hemmed in by the jostling throng, the long dusty street before him with its shops and tea-houses, the hot bright sunlight streaming over all, his exaltation collapsed and vanished, and he slunk along in dejection, the old submissive, puny Tong of before.

He stopped for a moment at a tiny stall and purchased with his last coins a little boiled rice, a pitiable portion that would not have

satiated a European child of ten. He would pass beyond the city gate and eat it in the shadow of the walls.

The corner he found was cool and comparatively pleasant; at least one was not trampled underfoot. On all sides low clay mounds arose, gutted by the Winter rains, now cracked and parched, and the low tile-roofed sheds of brickyards blocked the view of the country beyond. Behind him the great city wall rose gray and somber with here and there a half-ruined tower or a great rent in the masonry showing its age and lack of repair. At its base lay heaps of rubble, broken brick and rubbish.

Leaning against one of these piles, gray, parched, the color of the prevailing dust and rubbish, were the remains of what had once been a man. A pair of horribly twisted legs, scarcely human, protruded from the litter of rags which enveloped him. His eyes were wide open and glassy, his thin, drawn lips parched and cracked, and his bald head covered with patches of eczema and dry brown scab horrible to behold.

It was Ching-yi, an old acquaintance of Tong's, who some years previously had been struck down by a falling derrick while unloading a sugar steamer from Singapore. Tong squatted beside this wreck of humanity.

"How goes it, old friend?" he inquired.

The glassy eyes turned slowly in his direction and gazed for a time without recognition. Then the parched lips began to move. at first producing no sound, then a hoarse whisper.

"Badly, badly," he wheezed. "I have not tasted food for days and am too weak to crawl farther."

Tong produced his rice, though hungry himself, and watched his famished companion greedily swallowing the grains, which he conveyed to his mouth with fingers that resembled the claws of a bird of prey. After the last morsel was consumed Ching-yi uttered a sigh of content.

"That was good," he whispered.

"But why don't your sons take care of you?" questioned Tong. "They are strong and hearty."

"They departed three months since on a fireship, and I know not what has become of them. I am all alone in the world with none to help me."

Tong regarded him in sorrow.

"Once more the doings of the White Devils," he thought.

After a while he again addressed him, but he answered not, and though his glassy eyes were open and staring he evidently had fallen asleep, soothed to rest by the much needed food.

Tong continued on his way. The sun was already low in the west and casting long purple shadows over the clay hills and rubbish heaps as he approached an open space which seemed literally packed with humanity.

Every point of vantage and disadvantage was thronged with people, and even the tiled roofs of the brick kilns were occupied by spectators squatting or prone on their bellies. Above all arose a hum, a buzzing as of an enormous swarm of blue-bottle flies, which rose and fell with the swaying mass.

Tong understood at a glance. It was the place of execution, and he well knew that presently some poor wretch would fall under the sharp sword of the law.

A mighty impulse seized upon him and spurred him onward, and he pushed his way to right and left through the dense throng, slipping under like an eel and climbing over where needful.

It was not the mere spectacle that prompted him, for Tong had seen too many heads fall to feel idle curiosity. It was a great desire to stand among his fellows, shoulder to shoulder, to do, to act, he knew not what!

Suddenly he found himself in the foremost row. Three prisoners knelt before the ditch which would presently be their grave. They were stripped to the waist, with hands tied behind them so tightly that the cords cut into their flesh, and their pigtails had already been cut off and thrown into the ditch before them.

LOOKING closer, Tong became aware that he on the left was his old friend Houling, the porter. His eyes stared straight into the ditch, and his face was as expressionless and his air as indifferent as if the whole affair were no concern of his, while the mighty muscles of his trade lay in knots and bundles on his very bones without a suspicion of fat anywhere to drag the contrast of his anatomy into harmony. His two companions were just Chinamen like ten million others, lean, underfed, underdeveloped.

Tong could not get within speaking distance of his friend, but he inquired of a neighbor what they had been up to. Several volunteered information.

It appeared that Houling together with two acquaintances had broken into the house of a White Devil and had helped themselves to a watch and several other desirable trifles.

But Chinese justice, though ordinarily slothful, is swift when it comes to satisfy the demands of the hated and feared alien; and so it came to pass that Houling and his friends were seized behind the shed of the coal-yard an hour or two before with the booty still upon their persons.

The headsman now approached sword in hand. Houling, who was nearest, patiently bent his head downward for his greater convenience, and Tong noticed that his tied hands, black and grimy, were so tightly clutched together that the shoulder muscles lay on either side of his neck in huge white rolls.

Twice the broad blade flashed about the head

of the executioner and then descended with mighty force, the headsman throwing his entire weight into the blow. The head flew off into the ditch, eyes rolling, mouth convulsively opening and closing. The body, still kneeling, retained its position for a second or two and then sank slowly after like an empty sack. A few moments later the other two had joined their comrade.

Tong followed the dispersing crowd back to the town through the great red gate crowned by a shining dragon of tin. He walked along in silence, but his blood boiled within him and flashes like those of the sword-blade played before his eye. His fists were doubled and his teeth set.

Suddenly a yell almost in his ear, and he felt the cut of a whip-lash on his bare neck. He nimbly sprang aside, a horse's muzzle grazing his coat sleeve, while the wheels of an elegant open carriage all but passed over his toes, driving on recklessly, regardless of the swarming multitude in its path. That was the manner of the White Devils!

A woman and a child sat within, a large and small cloud of delicate white chiffon and laces; blond, immaculate, a race of another world, and under the pink cheeks and curling ringlets shone the same tempting white throats, like that of the master he had served.

All at once there was a shrill cry, the thin piping voice of a child, then a long-drawn whimper. The carriage stopped; the crowd surged about it—something had happened.

Tong shoved, pushed and craned his neck. An object was dragged from beneath the grinding wheels, a little bundle of humanity but so dirty and bedraggled as to be scarcely recognizable as such.

It was a street urchin, covered with blood and dust, his thin sticks of legs dangling with a curious twist, the rags of his tattered garment pressed into the wounds of his torn flesh.

The little girl covered her face with her hands; the lady, white to the lips, quickly descended and gave orders to place the little sufferer in the carriage. The crowd stood about staring passively, stupidly.

But now all Tong's pent-up feelings, so long held back, broke forth like the rushing waters from a bursting dam. His tongue, usually so sluggish, was suddenly loosened, and he began to speak as never before. What he said he knew not, but his lips moved and he heard his voice rise and fall, clear and piercing.

The crowd suddenly gave him their full attention and by the fixedness of their eyes and the expression of their upturned faces he saw he was saying something strong, wild and terrible, something outside himself that sent a shuddering wave through the multitude, and he saw it reflected in the terrified face of the lady, paler still, who quickly sprang into the carriage and gave a hasty order to drive on.

Menacing cries arose on all sides; hands were raised, fists shaken. A coolie had already seized the prancing horses by their bridles, but the butt of a heavy whip descended swiftly on his unprotected head and he fell back.

Blows rained right and left, the horses were dragged around and the carriage fled through the throng, wheels rattling, pursued by wild cries and flying stones and brickbats.

Tong seized an ax which was exposed for sale at a near-by stall and, swinging it high above his head, started off at a run, the surging mob following close at his heels with a roar like a mighty hurricane.

Think of the old scores to be wiped out, the untold suffering of the millions to be avenged! It needed a victim for its unthinking wrath, and Tong led it to the slaughter.

As for himself he seemed driven by a fiend who possessed him. His head throbbed to bursting, and before his eyes swam a vision of blood and gold, of countless riders galloping sword in hand over an endless plain, of heaped-up piles of corpses with white smooth throats severed from ear to ear!

THEY suddenly emerged into an open square, a wide roadway leading from it planted with trees, and behind, large white wooden houses surrounded by low brick walls—the foreign quarter of the town.

From ten thousand throats arose a mighty yell, which was increased still more when the lady they had seen in the carriage showed herself for a moment at a near-by window.

Tong climbed on top of a gate-post and once more harangued the crowd. Every sentence he uttered was greeted with hoarse cries and frenzied gestures. The seething, swaying mass at his feet took fire like tow.

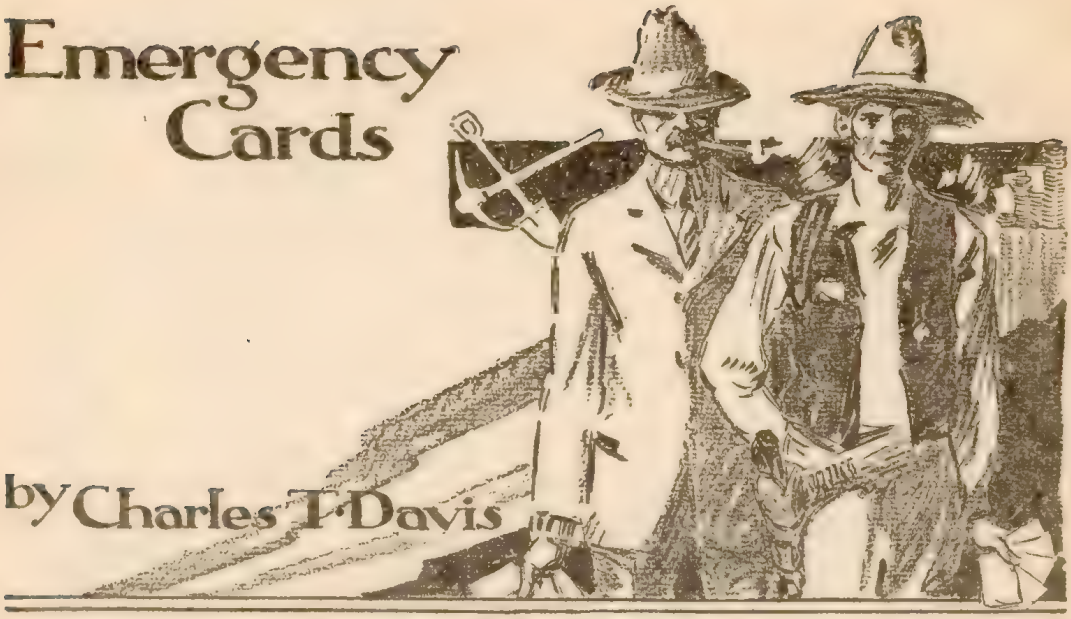
Then a great rush was made at the nearest gateway. Tong, who had torn a banner from the hands of a priest, led the van, still brandishing his ax in his right hand. The strong iron grating held for an instant, then crashed inward as if it were of glass, and the raging crowd surged into the compound.

But see, a puff of smoke from a window and a sharp report; then another and another, and Tong felt a burning pain in his chest as if a wasp had stung him. He took two more strides, then fell forward in a heap, still conscious that the crowd swept on and over him unchecked.

Darkness fell upon his vision. He thought himself once more in the dim temple, his glimmering joss-stick toppled over into an abyss, and he watched it descend, descend, a tiny spark, till at last it vanished in a sooty gloom.

An hour later the foreign quarter stood in flames, and within a week the entire land was in revolt. Tong's little joss-stick which overturned in the temple had kindled a mighty conflagration.

Emergency Cards



by Charles T. Davis

Author of "Tartarin of Trouble Creek."

SLIM rose from his corner seat in the Pullman smoker and lurched with the lurching of the train across to the water-cooler. A massive roll of currency, loosened by the up-and-down movement of the upholstery, slipped from his hip pocket and thudded upon the floor.

"Durn it, Slim!"

Old Andy Wagner's placid face puckered into a querulous and reproving frown as he retrieved the roll and stowed it carefully away in his inside coat pocket.

"You ain't fitten to pack a fo'-bit grubstake, much less fo' thousan' dollars. Ef I hadn't 'a' be'n right here you an' me'd 'a' been busted plum' flat ag'in."

Slim grinned, a singularly innocent and boyish grin that spread beguilingly across his freckles.

"Aw, shucks, Andy," he replied. "I'd 'a' missed her in a minute or two, and besides this here gentleman would 'a' saw her an' give her back."

The gentleman appealed to, the only other occupant of the compartment, turned his broad, smooth-shaven countenance upon the two. A smile curved his lips, but his close-set eyes remained as expressionless and inscrutable as the gray sage-brush and alkali wastes sliding past the car window.

"I don't know about that." His tone was bluff and hearty. "Four thousand dollars is four thousand dollars these days."

The speaker cast an eye over the rough outdoor garments of his companions—drab corduroy and heavy canvas contrasting with his own well-designed, suavely cut business-attire.

"Been selling cattle?" he asked.

"Naw suh," Andy responded. "Me an' Slim here has let loose o' one of our mines. Or ruther," he continued with candid loquacity in keeping with his guileless, elderly countenance, "she was more of a claim than a mine.

"Me an' Slim had us two claims—three oncet—over thar in the Telluriums."

He jerked a thumb toward the distant mountains, lying like a haze upon the desert's rim.

"They was durn good claims, too, but our grubstake run out on us before we could open 'em up, an' we had to sell one to raise capital. Fo' thousan' dollars, ——!" He spat contemptuously. "She was wuth nigher fawty, but fo' was all we could git. We kep' the best 'un though, the Florydory, an' we're all set to run her now. Ef things work out like they'd ort to, me an' Slim'll come pilin' out'n them mountains a couple o' millionaires in a year or so."

Slim lurched back from the water-cooler and subsided again into his seat, his youthful freckles still wreathed in the boyish grin.

"An' then us fer Honylulu," he said. "An' nothin' to do fer the rest of our lives but set under the pa'm-trees an' drink coconut-liquor and watch the huly-girls dance."

"Durn fool kid."

Andy expansively took the stranger into his confidence.

"Over thar in Cheyenne whar we sold that claim they had one o' these here Hay-wie-yan shows, an' Slim's been blame nigh crazy about hit ever since. Got his grip ha'f full o' Hay-wie-yan littertoor right now."

The stranger produced a card and extended it to Andy.

"My name is McGowan," he said. "George B. McGowan of Chicago; and I occasionally take a flyer in mines myself. Just what have you got up there in the Telluriums?"

"We got the dad-burndest best little mine in the mountains, but she hain't fer sale. Why, ef we's to let the Florydory go, me an' Slim 'ud be sold plum' out o' business. We got money enough to open her up now; that is—" he turned a reproachful gaze upon Slim, whose grin took on a quality of deprecation—"that is, as long as I tote the roll my own self whar she won't go bouncin' around on the floor er dribblin' acrost poker-tables."

"Had bad luck that way?" McGowan asked.

"I hain't," Andy responded. "But Slim here, he whooped off aroun' six hundred dollars down to Cheyenne before they larnt him he didn't know nothin' about draw an' a durn sight less about stud."

THE train droned on through the desert. The frost-like twinkle of morning on the alkali vanished as the sun climbed toward meridian. Through the medium of a pleasing surface geniality, reinforced by the distribution of cigars of undeniable quality, McGowan, to all appearances, had ingratiated himself firmly with the aged miner. Deftly he led the circle of conversation through a wide range of interest, always back to the Telluriums. Slim slept peacefully in his corner.

Old Andy's tale, garnered at first by McGowan through fragmentary references, and later from the steady flow of the old man's confiding narration, was a simple one. An epic unusual neither in the West nor elsewhere. A record of struggle—three determined men against a powerful corporation equally determined.

There were three of them at first; old Andy Wagner, Slim Hawkins and Joe Gerard. And at first there were three claims: the Belladonna, the Floradora and the El Dorado, all rich prospects in free-milling gold quartz. And there was, and still is, the Twin Peaks Milling and Mining Corporation, owner of vast holdings on both sides of the partners' claims.

The first claim of the trio passed when corporation-officials after a vain effort at acquisition by purchase—at fourth value—discovered vital errors in Gerard's surveys and assessment work on the El Dorado. Gerard himself passed in gun-smoke when he challenged the order of the corporation-owned court transferring title.

Andy and Slim, partners and several owners respectively of the Belladonna and the Floradora, held doggedly on against a losing game. They had not sufficient capital to develop their claims properly, and without development their wealth must remain forever potential and in expectancy. Neither could secure remunerative outside work in a country controlled by the powerful Twin Peaks. Such money-markets as their vicinity afforded offered a hold-up as to accommodations. The overconfident company had long since made its last offer and had settled down to a freeze-out game.

"An' so," Andy concluded, "me an' Slim here, we jest nachully stampeded clear off'n our own range an' clean on over to Cheyenne. I was a-hopin' to dicker with a feller I'd knowed fer twenty year or more; he'd 'a' treated us right an' he mout 'a' give us a agreement not to sell us out to the Twin Peaks. But he was gone, an' we had to take a chanct and fix up a deal with Gamblin' Bill Brady. Had to sell him the Bellerdonner outright fer a measly fo' thousan'.

"Bill'd been over in our country, an' he knowed what we had. I reckon, likewise, he knowed what we didn't have in th' way o' finances, fer he shore druv a sharp bargain. Howsomever—" placidity again spread a benignant hand over Andy's mildly plaintive countenance—"fo' thousan' is plum' sufficient fer to open up the Florydory fer all she's wuth, an' that's plum' plenty fer me an' Slim."

Gradually the increasing engine-smoke had betokened ascent, and now the challenge of a whistle came back from the laboring engine. Sage-brush and alkali-flats had given way to scrub-pine and granite outcrop and the far, faint line of hills that had rimmed the desert at dawn loomed imminent through the crystal air.

"Hello," Andy observed. "Gitt'n' in to'ards home. Stoppin' at Giltedge, Mr. McGowan, or goin' on through'?"

"Stopping, I guess. I've got a little business for my company with the Twin Peaks." He made the admission reluctantly. "We're trying to sell them a new cyanide-process. Like to have you as a customer, too, when you're in the market."

"Shore. We'll be needin' a lot o' stuff. Glad to figger with yore folks. Ever been up this way before? Well, the shawt-line to Twin Peaks crosses the U. P. here at Giltedge, an' you'll have time a-plenty to git yo' train. We git in at three an' the shawt-line drags out aroun' six."

He reached across and prodded the somnolescent Slim in the short ribs.

"Wake up, Slim, an' pay for yo' bed. We're gitt'n' into camp."

The whistle-note drifted back again. Andy reached into his pocket and drew forth the abused bank-roll. Assuring himself that his partner had awakened sufficiently to appreciate responsibility, he made transfer of custody.

"Now I'm a-trustin' you ag'in, Slim." His voice was severe.

"I got a mess o' runnin' around to do in Giltedge before we hit the trail fer th' camp, an' I'm a-goin' to have to let you 'tend to the outfitt'n'. Git us enough grub to run about a

month, an' fifty sticks er sich matter o' dinnamite, an' ef ole Twospot's back ain't plum' healed yit, git us another jack. Better git another'n anyhow. I aim fer to do some packin' th' nex' time we pilgrims down from th' hills. An' don't git over two thousan' dollars' wuth o' ammynition fer that new gun o' yore'n."

Another whistle-blast cut the flow of Andy's instructions. A network of cattle-corrals and loading-chutes framed itself in the car window and slid slowly by. The screeching brakes bit into the wheels and the train jolted to a stop. Giltedge had arrived.

IT WAS about four o'clock when Slim next came across his train acquaintance. In the back end of the Paradise Saloon McGowan sat at a poker-table with a corporal's guard of the tavern's habitués.

"Hello," he hailed. "Finished up with your business?"

"Jest about." Again the diffident grin. "Findin' time heavy on yo' hands?"

McGowan crooked a finger at the barkeeper, and when that worthy had set forth glasses and a bottle, invited Slim to refreshments. Slim refreshed, and McGowan confessed ability in aiding *tempus* to *fugit*.

"I can always pass the time," he said, "where there are cards and chips and men. Sit in. I've still got about two hours to kill."

Slim greeted the other players affably. "'Lo, Jim; howdy Red," and turned again to McGowan.

"Why, I wouldn't mind takin' a hand myself, but ef I 'uz to lose as much as a dime, ole Andy 'd never git over it. That there Cheyenne fy-ancee o' mine's goin' to pervide him with conversation fer six months anyway."

"Shucks," from the skeptical Red. "Ole Andy clucks aroun' you like a old-maid hen with a Easter aig, but any durn fool thing you take a notion to do is jest about the proper caper with Andy."

"Aw, come on in." Thus Jim. "This here three-hand stud's a-gitt'n' old. I ain't had higher than a ten in the hole till yit. Drag up a cheer an' we'll make her a draw game."

McGowan pushed a chair forward and Slim slid into it.

The tide of fortune ebbed and flowed calmly and serenely.

The stakes were small, the betting light. The Paradise's nightly rush of business had not begun, and the spectators were few and uninterested.

A half-hour passed—an hour, and Red with maledictions on the three queens which had tempted him into calling Slim's three kings, shoved back his chair.

"Eight dollars is enough to lose in this here piker game," he said. "Which likewise hit leaves me broke till pay-day."

Shortly afterward Jim paid his remaining few chips for the privilege of drawing to a four-card straight flush. He filled neither straight nor flush, and with his fellow pauper, wandered over to the bar.

Slim and McGowan faced each other across the table.

"Red's eight and Jim's thirteen is twenty-one dollars we've won between us. Pretty evenly divided, too."

McGowan estimated the stacks.

"Do you still crave action?"

Slim glanced at the clock above the bar.

"Well, she's still fawty-five minutes till yore train-time," he said sociably, "an' I hate to dee-prive you o' the onlies' way you got o' passin' time. But two-handed draw is a purty slow proposition. Mighty seldom git any hands out."

"It isn't the cards you get, but the play you get on them," McGowan said sententiously. "Two-handed draw can be developed into a he-game, that is," a slight sneer crept into his suave tones, "if the players have any money to bet and the nerve to bet it."

A flush o'erspread Slim's freckles.

"I reckon I got the money," he said. "When I play cyards, hit's understood that what I got in my pocket I plays back o' my stack."

"How much have you got in your pocket?" McGowan's sneer was more pronounced and offensing.

"Ee-liminatin' the casualties at Cheyenne and the high cost o' livin' here,"—Slim riffled through the remaining bills in the "Belle-donner" roll—"she now stands about thirty-two hunderd and some odd dollars, ef that would int'rust you."

McGowan drew forth a plethoric wallet.

"I think," he said, rapidly estimating the contents, "that I can comfortably cover that. Yes, and a little over. No limit?" He raised his eyebrows.

"Sky," said Slim. "Deal."

NOW the law of permutations and the rules of choice clearly demonstrate that two-handed draw poker is in fact and of necessity a slow game. Under no conceivable circumstances can there be more than nineteen cards out at a time—legitimately—and these few seldom produce hands of sufficient value to warrant a battle.

But, being inflexible, the law of permutations and the rules of choice and chance make no allowances for contingencies. The substitution of skill for luck, for instance; and science for chance. By skill and science is not necessarily meant manual dexterity alone.

Poker is anciently founded upon a sound

psychology. Not only must the player's observation turn upon such cards as chance—or skill—places in his hand, but upon his opponent as well. Things are not what they seem, and nowhere is it so clearly made manifest as in the ancient and honorable game of draw.

Slim was not what he seemed. But this McGowan did not know. McGowan saw simply a simple mountain youth, freckled, diffident, bitten by the gambling-bug. McGowan did not know that Slim had looked oft and skilfully upon the flushes when they were red—or black—and the houses when they were full in his hand; and that in fast company. But most of all McGowan did not know that he was not to Slim and Andy the stranger he professed to be.

From the first the card-duel upset Dr. Permutation's dope. Practically every pot was opened with high pairs or better; and threes, straights and fulls were frequent.

Old Andy sauntered genially in just as Slim laid down a flush and two hundred dollars to McGowan's small full house.

McGowan, with his back to the door, did not see the venerable prospector; nor, busied with raking in his winnings, did he see the glance of understanding which flashed from Slim to his partner.

The play progressed, favoring one, then the other.

McGowan dealt the next hand, glanced at his hand and then at the clock. It lacked twenty minutes of his train-time.

"Open fer a hunderd," Slim drawled.

"Called and raised five hundred."

Old Andy lounged over and leaned against the table.

"At hit ag'in, Slim?" But the chiding overtones had gone from his voice.

"Hain't no objections, air they?"

"Lord, no."

Andy turned to McGowan, speaking across the generous pile of crumpled bills upon the table.

"This here seems to be a man-size game, but th' boy'll never learn that he kain't cyard-play ontil he bucks action. Mebby after he's fiddled away them fo' thousan' an the Florydory as well, he'll come to a understandin' with hisself."

Slim was counting the balance of his roll with one hand. The cards McGowan had dealt him he covered with the other. He paid no attention to Andy.

"I don't know what ye got, stranger," he said. "But callin' that five-hunderd raise o' yore'n leaves me jest a even twenty-six hunderd that says I beat ye. I raise ye twenty-six hunderd."

McGowan paled slightly. His gaze passed from Slim and rested upon old Andy. Reassured that that benignant ancient had no intention of interfering with his partner's extravagance, he again regarded his hand.

"Twenty-six hundred practically cleans me," he said. "But if your faith in your hand is as great as mine, we may still tilt the betting."

Slim raised an interrogative eyebrow.

"There was some talk of a mining-claim you owned," McGowan explained. "Would you care to venture that?"

"Ag'in what?"

McGowan's reply came with difficulty.

"Why—er—you see— It's like this. My company has er—acquired the deed to the Belladonna. I have it with me. I can see your twenty-six-hundred raise, and re-raise the Belladonna against your Floradora."

Strangely this information concerning the Belladonna caused neither Slim nor Andy surprize, but McGowan did not notice this until long and profane hours afterward.

Red and Jim and others, scenting high play, had ranged around the table. Andy held his vantage-post at McGowan's right.

Slim made a final study of his cards.

"All right," he consented. "But she'll take bookkeepin'!"

The bookkeeping consisted in making out a bill of sale of the Floradora and a transfer of the Belladonna deed. Bystanders offered aid as counsel and witnesses. Old Andy took little part in the transaction, but kept up a gentle rawhiding of Slim.

"Boy's prob'ly misread his hand," he said dolorously to the spectators. "He does that frequent. Looky here—" He drew a heavy Colt revolver from his pocket. "This here gun Slim bought in Cheyenne fer a .45. Gun-sto' clerk told him that's what she was, an' Slim, he bought up a mess o' .45 ca'tridges fer her. An' now, looky here—" Andy drew forth a handful of cartridges. "See them shells? Them's .44's fer my gun."

He swung out the cylinder of the revolver and loaded it completely around. The cartridges fitted perfectly. "'J'ever see .44 shells fit a .45 gun like that?" The old man chuckled. "That there gun-sto' clerk jest natchully sold Slim a .44."

Andy rested the muzzle of the heavy weapon upon the table.

"Misreadin' a hand's wuss'n misreadin' a gun."

McGowan, blinded by his money-lust, missed this bit of by-play. He had scanned and approved of the Floradora bill of sale. The deed to the Belladonna lay at his elbow.

"Your bet," to Slim. "What are you doing?"

"I'm a-raisin' you twenty-six hunderd dollars an' the Florydory mine."

Slim pushed money and documents to the center of the table.

"And I," McGowan's voice was eager, "am calling all bets. Cards?"

"These suits." Slim tapped his hand.

"And these—these suit; and you're called." McGowan dropped the deck upon the table. "And now, all cards being out and all money bet, this concludes the evening's entertainment for one of us. What have you?"

A double *click click* obtruded upon his consciousness and old Andy's face, with eyes deadly as a basilisk's swam into his ken. And below them, no whit less deadly, glared the muzzle of the heavy gun.

Old Andy spoke.

"The gentleman's called ye, Slim. He's bet ye that new cyanide-process he was a-fixin' fer to sell to the Twin Peaks, alias the deed to the Bellerdonner. Show him what ye got."

Slim dropped his cards one by one upon the table. But where there should have fallen the four nines and the seven McGowan had dealt him, there dropped the ace, king, queen, jack and ten—the royal flush of spades.

Outside the raucus tooting of the "shawt-line" announced imminent departure. The clock above the bar struck six. McGowan licked a tongue across his dry lips.

Slim's voice broke the spell. He laid his hand upon his cards.

"Them's mine," he announced. "Kin ye beat 'em?"

"——, no!" McGowan's chair scraped back. McGowan went thence.

"SHUCKS," Andy's kindly drawl punctured the tensity as a pin does a toy balloon. A tremendous sigh went up from the crowd.

"Why, the durn short-cyard a-tryin' to come it over me an' Slim that-a-way. Why, we seen him in Jack's place down to Cheyenne when he trimmed old Bill Brady out'n the Bellerdonner not three hours after Bill paid us fo' thousan' good dollars fer her. Why, the gall of him a-comin' after the Florydory this a-way!"

"But lissen here, Slim." Doubt of the play was strong in Red's mind. "Lissen; did that bal' face idjit deal you a pat royal and then try to run ye?"

"Shucks, naw." Slim's grin was fearful and wonderful. "I've had that royal in my pocket ever since Andy come in. Y'see, I seen the feller when he filled his full off'n the bottom ag'in a flush he let me fill, so I give Andy the high sign an' Andy, he pirooted aroun' in another deck with backs like this here'n an' picked me out a hand I could kind o' lay away fer ee-mergencies. You jest seen the ee-mergency."

"Wonder what he had, hisself," Red mused.

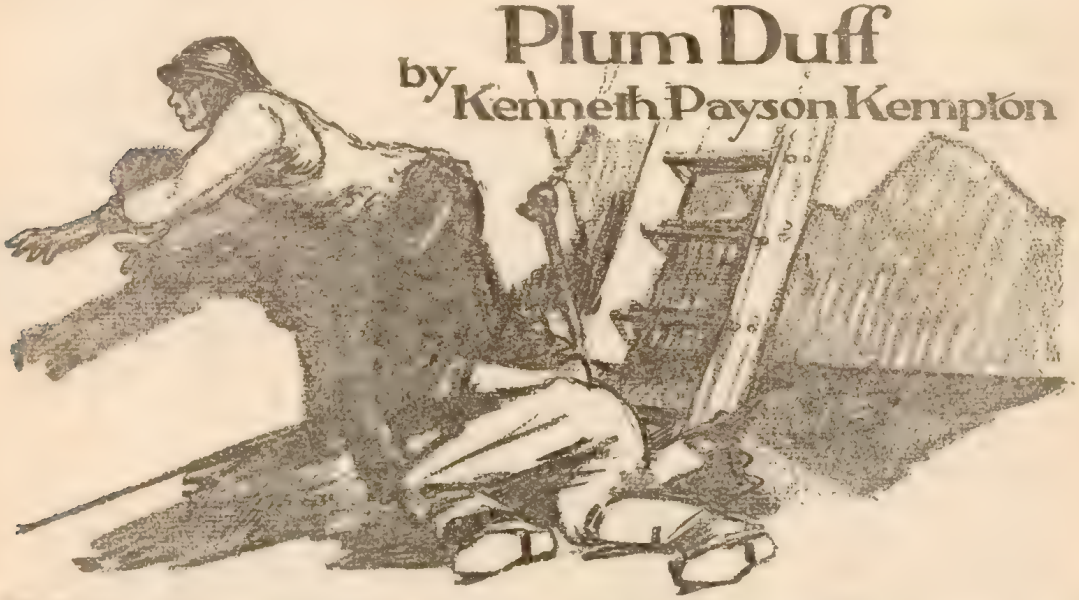
He slid a finger under McGowan's cards and flipped them over, face up.

Fanwise on the table lay the ace, king, queen, jack and ten

McGowan's hand was the royal flush of spades!

Plum Duff

by Kenneth Payson Kempton



I SEEN a piece in the paper where they wanted seamen. That's how it started. My pay from old Duff of the *Caramao* was nigh cleaned out—a wicked bird, Duff, and a bad crate, that *Caramao*. Fore and aft she stunk like bilges and rolled twenty-five degrees on a blasted mill-pond. And he stood on her rickety bridge, a beautiful Colt .45 in his fist, and popped at whosoever in the black gang showed his head over the engine-room grating.

Well, as I was saying, my stuff from that hitch was getting light in pocket and the city dust was clawing my throat. But be split if I wanted to ship in no fire-room stoke-hold again, Duff or no Duff. So when I seen this

piece SEAMEN WANTED, I knowed right off—quick-witted I always was—that *there* was a berth. And I says:

"Ho, Mark Dobey, ye ornery-eyed sculpin, be you a seaman? And if so, why? And if not, why in —— not?"

So I kids myself into light and carefree manners and hove around to sign up. The bloke squinted his mean little eyes at my papers and seen all was hunky-dory. Then he relieves his mind of sentiments along about as follows—

"Ship-is-the-*Pungai*-you'll-find-her-on-Fifty-East-she-sails-tomorrow-light-for-Valparaiso-where-all-hands-will-be-paid-off-and-the-vessel-turned-over-to-new-owners-NEXT!"

Paid off in Valparaiso.

"So that's the bug in the broth," says I, and I turns quick to hand him back my half of that dod-rotted document. But be split if he hadn't signed the next in line already and was crooning to him—

"Ship-is-the-*Pungai*-you'll-find-her-on——"

I waited for no more. The vessel's name did not appeal to me: some way I knowed she'd be old and rolly. Sailing light I don't never care for.

But paid off in Valparaiso!

"No, no, Mark me boy," says I. "It will not do a-tall," says I. And as I turns the corner, coming faint out the window I hears "turned-over-to-new-owners-NEXT!"

So then that night I steamed down along to Tim's. And I told Timmie all about it. And just as I got ready to go Tim says—

"Just one more; this time on the house."

Then I took note of a couple blokes in seafaring clothes—I'll lay one was a bosun; he had the wicked jaw—setting in the corner and watching Tim and I. So I blowed over and told 'em all about the *Pungai* and Valparaiso and how I'd be split if I'd go off down there to be paid off on the near edge of nowhere, and they laughed like proper hellions and—

"Sure," says they. "We're with you there, brother," says they two.

We had several more after that. Tim come over from behind the bar and we had several more. My stummick was having one of her off spells. I had ate some fish at Tartarini's and it had set sort of heavy. Pretty soon along that fish begun to bother me considerable and I seen Tim and the two sailormen go around and round, and the next thing I knowed I didn't know anything a-tall.

Well, I come to. And the first thing I seen was a big calendar made fast to a bulkhead with "Friday, March 13" plastered all over it. And the next thing I seen was a life-belt strapped to the deck right over my head. It was old. The rats had chawed off one corner and the cork was oozing out. But there was bright new lettering stenciled on it, and when I seen that lettering my liver turned turtle. Be split if it ain't "S. S. *Pungai*."

So I shut me eyes tight and pinched me arm hard.

Says I:

"Dobey, old sparhawk, 'tis that fish at Tartarini's. Wake up, Mark Dobey, wake up."

Then I opens one eye just a mite. "S. S. *Pungai*," sees I again. So then I knowed there ain't no dream to it and I lets out a howl for being paid off in Valparaiso. And the vessel took a roll, and I fetched up on the deck.

Some little time later in come the coot with the wicked jaw I'd seen at Tim's.

"Hillo, brother," says he.

"Dod rot ye, hillo," says I.

"Come, come," says he, "bear no malice, brother. I had me orders," says he. "And treat me respectful hereinafter," says he. "For I'm the bosun along aboard."

"Bosun me eye," I says to him. "Ye're a bloomin' shanghai-artist in disguise," says I.

"Well, well, call it that if you will," says he. "Howsomever, have you ever done tricks at the wheel?"

"I have," says I.

"Good! The old man is wanting a fourth helmsman on the bridge. You relieve Dugan at noon. So now you're a quartermaster," says he. "Come now, how's that—quartermaster, hey?" And he slaps me on the back. "What's your name?" says he.

"Dobey, dod rot ye. What's yourn?"

"Bell, Bosun Bell; that's me."

At that he left and I followed him up the forecastle companion for to give this *Pungai* some slight inspection.

So help me if that ship ain't the meanest and wretchedest and dirtiest-looking thing I set eye to since footing it off the *Caramao*. In point of fact she might have been sister ship to that there rotten crate. Five holds she had, the bunker being small and abaft her superstructure.

Her engine-room gratings come up just alongside the funnel, and I could most believe myself popping up from the fire-room for a whisk of air and seeing that Duff leaning over the after bridge rail, the blue Colt in his drunken fist. I could almost hear him roar and laugh and blaze away as I ducked back and he howled—

"Get back there to your fires, you scum!"

And like the *Caramao* this here hadn't had no paint nor tar on her plates since —— knowed when. All her decks was messy. Ashes laying here and there. Lines rolled up all ways. Squeegees under the rail, no tarpaulins on the winches, cargo-booms banging for want of lashing, running-gear all scrimshawed.

But when I come alongside her superstructure I looked and hanging on the forward bridge rail I seen a brand new name-plate, *PUNGAI*,

shining nice as you please in the sun. It looked queer, all that new paint alongside them blisters and chipped-off spots, and the messy decks and all. And I says to myself:

"Hist, Mark, what's the meaning thereof? Let's have another peek at that there life-belt over your bunk," says I.

So we ducked below and did. We took that belt off her straps and inspected her proper. Very faint beneath the new black stencil we seen old letters— a C to start and some A's and an R and—Split me for a sinner, it's *Caramao!*

And the calendar on the bulkhead went on saying it was Friday the thirteenth. I had no heart to argue the point.

SO LONG about eight bells I blowed up onto the bridge and took the wheel away from this party Dugan.

"So'theast b'east half-east," says he. "And if you set any store by your skin—" this he whispers close to my ear—"keep her on it."

"Ye don't say," says I and no more, for the mate had his eye on us.

There was a quarter-turn of play to that wheel and every time I turned her over you could hear the steam chortle in her innards and the deck begin to buckle underfoot. And the whole bridge kept a-shaking and a-quivering, the which well I knowed was loose bolts and faulty connections down below in the engine-room. But I kept her on her course somehow, though mistrusting we'd ever fetch up anywheres nigh Valparaiso. Her port of destination seemed likelier to be sea-bottom.

Pretty soon the mate, a rangy bird with a broken nose—I found out later his name to be Hayward—pretty soon this Hayward come over and conned me and said he'd slip down for a bite if I thought I could hold her on her course for ten minutes or so. I told him I could if the tiller-chains did not part nor the wheel come adrift in my hands.

So he laughed and went, but turned about on the ladder to give me a look. And I begun to think my free lip had made it me versus all hands.

But I turned my head at a little noise. And be split if there ain't a woman! Did I say woman? A girl—a child more like. She had stepped out of the chart-room and stood there in the door, looking straight at me and smiling like here we are in heaven at last. A lovely little piece she was, with a dancing blue eye to her and flowers in her cheeks, and an ankle that would knock ye down for sheer joy. So she stood there in the door, her pretty arms crossed and her pretty head a-tilt to one side, and smiled at old Mark Dobey. And I seen the sun was shining.

"You're the first funny thing I've seen since I got married," says she.

"My aim is to please, ma'am," says I, polite though staggering within.

"You do," says she. "I'm Mrs. Duff, the captain's wife," says she. "What's your name?"

"Dobey," says I very faint.

"I like you. You're so ugly."

I did not care why. The fact was enough.

We passed considerable remarks after this about the weather, and so on. I always did like a ready talker, a straight-to-the-minute talker. She was that. What come into her head, that she said. No mincing and shilly-shallying, saying one thing while meaning another. Boy, she was a rare one! And she begun to tell me——"

At this moment I noticed the *Caramao* was steaming a matter of some four degrees off her course, so I had to turn around. But she came up and perched on the rail and her hair blew in the wind.

Then she begun to tell me things like she'd knowed me at school. Happy she seemed at telling, as if it took some load off her mind. But now and again I caught her looking aft to the chart-room and the staterooms beyond. And I marveled at her words.

For it seems there was dirty business behind this here voyage. Some Chilean birds had bought the *Caramao* cash down, and glad enough her owners was to lose her. But they, being slick in a business way, held insurance on the boat until such time as she should be turned over. And the bill of sale they was sending down in the care of Duff.

So they had the price in pocket and if anything happened to the crazy tub before she made Valparaiso breakwater, why they'd have the insurance too. Knowing what and how she was, they laid back and waited. This much the girl had learned from her husband, he being talky-drunk the night they come aboard.

So I asked her about him. How she come to—you know. And be split if she didn't tell me that too!

They'd gone to school together in Bristol and he'd run away to sea. And a month back her old mother had died of the influenzy, leaving her without kin nor a rag to her back hardly, nor a cent in pocket. And then along he come home from the ship's last hitch, blowing of big money and seeing the world. He was a fine big handsome man, was Duff. The rest was easy—for him. But the night of the wedding he gets roaring drunk and knocks her across the room.

"And I won't and can't tell you any more," she says. "I shouldn't have said anything. God knows I'm shamed——"

She stopped short and I looked up and seen her eyes. Then I knowed Duff was behind me.

"Are you coming to eat?" says he. "Or are you not?"

"I'm coming," says the child.

And after she'd run in, he blowed up and stood looking at me up and down, trying to remember where he'd seen me before. Like as if he knowed my father was a crook and my mother not what she'd oughter be, but couldn't quite catch my name. Not a word says he, but stared hard and then turned to go in.

And by the grace of —— that watch of mine and Friday the thirteenth come to an end.

But worse was to follow. Right off I seen that crew there was hard cases to a man. Nor I ain't the one to be fussy along of my mates. But when they starts a billy-hoo the first night out down below in the forecastle, and knives drawn, and the only thing preventing bloodshed is that there Bell knocking both parties flat with a spanner, why then I'm a mind to watch my step and sleep light. And I got to wondering how much this gang was going to stand from Captain Duff. Nor I ain't got long to wonder.

For the skipper was bellowing-drunk the livelong day, and night too as fur as I seen. He'd not popped at nobody with that Colt, but the third day out on my watch I seen the bulge of it in his pants pocket as the wind rared up his coat.

And that day he leaned down over the bridge and cursed Watson, the chief engineer, for not making over seven knots. Cursed him fore and aft and from truck to keelson, with that girl of his standing there and making off she couldn't hear. And this Watson looks up cool as ice and tells him to sober up before monkeying with the log, and goes below.

Then somebody laughs. And Duff gets purple and reaches around to that pants pocket, but thinks better of it and howls at Bell to put the man in irons. This Bell does, he being a smooth one. But I seen the man at mess later and Bell and him laughing over it, there being no irons aboard.

But it was all the same to Duff. My next trick at the wheel I hears him gassing to the mate along of proper discipline.

OFF Hatteras we hit bad weather. I seen it coming, the wind backing from easterly a couple points into the north and freshening up. A cross-chop kicked up in no time and the *Caramao* begun to pound. The sky looked thick and dirty like stale putty except where I seen little bits of cirrus laced ragged by that making wind. Along to the east'ard there lay one stripe of dirty yellow.

But fair wind or foul, Duff never batted a lash but kept on guzzling. 'Twas the mate looked at the glass. The gang down forrard, too, never knowed nor cared how the wind lay. They was rolling the bones half the time and scrapping, and the other half planning how to get at the skipper's liquor.

But that child! When first the weather changed she'd come out on to the bridge by chance, and I seen her eyes get big and scairt.

"Hist, ma'am, don't be worrying your head about it," I tells her. "This old cradle will ride it fair enough," says I.

And she give me a smile worth one million dollars and went along in to her man.

Well, in a matter of hours we got it heavy. Half a gale it was by night of the fifth day out, and still making. Rain and sleet, thick as mud. I had the morning trick, and when I come up as it begun to get light I seen we was in for the worst.

I've steamed from Bluefields to Port Arthur and from Nome to Axim, Afriky, but I never seen a sea like that there. I marveled how she'd lived the night, for pounding and pitching. And the deep gray water was pouring over her bows on every plunge, and roiling aft, the old box quivering like she had the ague and had it bad.

Her decks was a sight. For what loose gear in the way of cordage and such as had not been washed clean away was banging and slatting here and there and all over. By the grace of —— had Hayward battened her hatches. Else I would be telling this to Saint Peter—or to that other.

But along about six bells things begun to ease a mite. The muck lifted and the rain stopped and the wind got reasonable for a spell, and I says maybe we was born to hang at that.

As the muck cleared away what does we see not a quarter to windward but a little coasting-freighter! And she was foundering for fair. I rubbed my eyes and misdoubted I was seeing things, but there she lay wallowing, her bows awash, ready to dive for glory in a matter of minutes. I seen the name of her through the glasses—it was *Betsy Lass*. And I caught sight of a little knot of men on her after deck waving at us.

Hayward slammed over the engine-room telegraph for full astern and called down to bosun telling him to loose the starboard boat. Though how he thought to get a boat away in them seas was more'n I could figure.

Then Duff come stampeding out on to the bridge.

"What's this, Mister Hayward?" says he.

"Ship in distress, sir," says the mate. "We can no more than get them off before she sinks."

"You lily-livered fool!" says Duff at that. "We've enough to do to keep afloat ourselves without turning the ship into a charity club and old folks' home. Let the swine go!" says he, and slammed the telegraph back.

Then he took off his cap and waved his hand at them aboard the wreck.

The mate's eyes went black. I seen the muscles on his cheeks line out hard.

"Cap'n, there's a woman aboard," says he.

And sure enough, I notes a skirt blowing by her weather rail.

"I don't care who's aboard," says Duff.

He turned to where the bosun and a couple hands was unlashing the starboard boat, and his hand went crawling back toward that bulge in his pocket.

"Stand back there from that boat, you misbegotten slime!" he roars. "Take your hands off them falls!"

Now them down below was hard cases, like I've said. But I'll lay there was not one of them so dirt-mean as not to give a hand to them in danger of their lives. Hard men they was. But not that—no. And I seen them hesitate, looking up to Duff and then again out to windward where the little craft lay.

Then the skipper snaps out that blue gun. I hears the roar of it and sees the bosun crumple up in the boat.

A matter of half an hour afterward I looked out astern. The *Betsy Lass* was gone.

THAT night I was on again. And glad I was to get out from below where there was murder afoot. Bell, the bosun, was hurt bad and they couldn't stop the blood. And a little man he'd knocked around for this and that swore he'd have the skipper's heart for gunning his crew. Bell laid there and smoked and laughed and spat blood. And they all swore they'd have Duff's heart and bring it down to him.

But up on the wheel I seen the weather shut in thick again, and it commenced to rain. Then I knowed we was done. For word had been passed the pounding had started her old plates. The bridge was shaking bad with her auxiliaries on the pumps. The *Caramao* would stand no more handling. And without some craft come along and treated us better than we done the *Betsy Lass*, the jig was up for fair.

All I cared was for that girl. Me—I'd little to lose. But her so young—and soft. It seemed a muck of shame that she should rot below with all that filth about her. And yet, thinks I, perhaps she's best out of her troubles. At that a great lump stuck in my throat. I wished I had my fingers on that there Colt.

Pretty soon she come out of the chart-room and stood alongside of me.

"I've heard about the *Betsy Lass*," she said. "And I got to thinking about them aboard of her. I couldn't stay in there any longer—with him."

She had on a suit of oilskins and she gripped the rail beside me, for the gale was shrieking in our ears. My heart nigh cracked for her. Her head was down the like she was crying to herself. She looked so small and pitiful.

"Never you mind, ma'am," says I. "Things will come right somehow. Keep your nose in the air," says I.

Then she smiled like she could. Close up to me she come and looked me in the eye, smiling. Like a flower she seemed, half-crushed in the mud, and yet lovely. So there we stood, me steering with one hand and the *Caramao* pounding and bucking and groaning.

"You're the best man I ever knowed," she says.

"Don't forget you ain't knowed many," says I.

She fair laughed at that—but the laugh ended in a gasp, and she jumped away. And turning half-around, I seen Duff knock her flat to the deck. Then he come for me.

"Now you ——"

But here's Hayward running up the ladder.

"Cap'n, the men want you. Bell is dead!"

Duff turned, the blue gun under his fingers.

"Well, and what if he is?" he screeches. "By —— I'll show the rats who's skipper here! Dead, is he? Want me, hey? I'll come!"

The man was wild with rum. He shook his fist under my nose and stumbled down after Hayward. I left the wheel and picked up the girl. We heard two shots—then two more. But I never laid eyes on Duff again.

WE waited on the bridge. Pretty soon along I heard the black gang come cursing and scrambling up through the gratings, and then a mighty hissing and boiling. No need to pass the word. The water was up to her fires. And the *Caramao* began to list heavy to starboard. Then the big seas played —— with her.

I run down to her decks and tripped over Hayward at the foot of the ladder. He laid on his face. The back of his head was stove to pulp.

Down aft they had a boat loose. Watson was with them. Nobody but black gangs would of ever tried to launch a boat that night. I called them fools and they called me worse and jumped in. And as they manned the falls to lower away, come a gray old sea and a roll of the deck. Against the *Caramao's* steel plates that boat smashed to splinters and the bunch of them dropped out of sight.

Then I tumbled up and down over the bucking decks of that misbegotten craft, calling for the men. Not a living soul could I find—but three more corpses, and one held the blue gun. So then I knowed where Duff was gone. And I went up to the bridge and found that child cuddled into a corner. When she seen me she gave a cry, holding out her arms. I done what I could to comfort her.

Along toward morning the weather cleared. The sky got sweet as a bell and the stars come out and laughed at us. But I knowed the old hooker had got her never-get-over. She listed something wicked, so that when we stood on the leeward side of the bridge we was standing plump over open water. But that child was brave as never I seen. She smiled and said as how she didn't care whatever happened. Be split if I did!

So we set down under the leeward rail and waited for what was coming. And we talked considerable about nothing in particular. I found out her name—Elsa. I says it over once or twice. Tried to get her to call me Mark, but all she'd do was laugh. Pretty foolish we was, I reckon—me being old enough for her father.

Pretty soon she dropped asleep. And I just sat there with my arm around the little cuss and grinned in the dark. It was not a bad way to go, at that.

I might have gone asleep myself. It was quiet on that bridge. Things seemed to have smoothed out a lot. And if we had to go—Split me! The world's afire!

A great old light was on that slanting bridge-deck and on her cargo-masts and rigging. I jumps to my feet—and there lay a monstrous bright eye of a search-light a couple hundred yards to leeward.

"Wake up, wake up, Mrs. Dobey!" says I.

She jumped on her feet and grabbed hold of me for fear of that great light. But they switched it off us down to the sea alongside. Then we seen that search-light land on a ship's life-boat about half-ways between them and us. And the glare being out of our eyes then, we took note of a great big hulk there to leeward, sheer high-sided and lit up like a hotel—a passenger-boat she was, and a monstrous big one.

Somebody in the lifer hailed us. Faint it come above the wash and roar, for the wind was still fresh and the seas wicked.

"Aboard the wreck!"

I grabbed the skipper's big megaphone.

"Hillo, the life-boat!"

"How many aboard?"

"Two—man and woman," says I.

"Have ye no gangway ladder?" say he.

"We be derelicts, not house-painters."

"You'll have to jump then and take your chances," he come back. "And be quick about it before the both of us founders," says he.

"Jump nothing!" says I at that. "Stand by and I'll show you a trick," says I. "I've been shipwrecked before," says I.

"The —— you have!" says he.

"Now guard your tongue, man. I'm telling you there's a lady aboard."

No answer.

All this time I've been ripping a couple life-preservers off the bridge rail. Then I ducks below and fetches up a heaving-line. I lashes the two preservers together and one end of the heaving-line to them, and the other end I makes fast to a stanchion. The child watches all, and claps her hands when that the idea gets her.

Then I hove the preservers well out to leeward. And after a bit I seen by the slant of the line they had floated out clear of the ship.

"And now if you'll put your pretty arms around my neck," I says, "I'll be taking you home."

WE WAS famous from the moment we set foot on that grand ship. Fine ladies and coots in white pants clusters around us and puts all manner of fool questions till a tall bloke in blue with gold stripes come pushing through the crowd very dignified.

"What ship is that and who are you?"

And I had the truth on my lip when that blessed girl stamps neat but silent on my foot.

"That's the *Betsy Lass*," says she. "My brother and I took passage aboard her for—for Tampico. Can you take us there?"

"I'm bound for Southampton today," laughs he. "Some other time perhaps."

But at the word Southampton my heart begun to rock. For I knowed of a little tobacconist-shop could be had for a song, a matter of a mile out on the High Street, with a garden aft and ramblers over the companionway.

"Southampton or Tampico makes little odds," says I, "so long as my—sister and me is still alive."

Then the women took her below and the men took me and rigged me out in clothes the like of which had never touched Mark's back before. And when I come out on deck, there she was—and I'd never knowed her if she'd not of smiled. She held out something to me. I seen it was a hat.

"I've got one," says I.

"No, this here is a collection—for us," she says. "There's nigh five hundred dollars in it," she says.

Plainly I seen that tobacconist-shop!

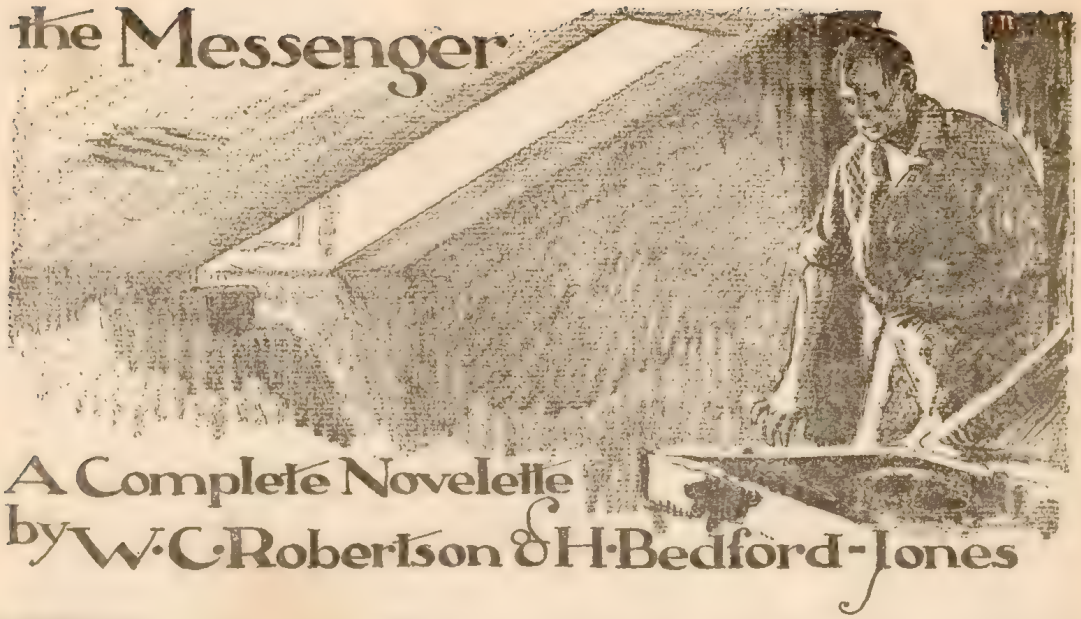
Well, we walked up and down the decks of that grand vessel. And I got to thinking of that Duff and how he got what —— owed him. I looked down at this slip of an angel at my side and thought of the hell she'd lived through. Duff was a —— coot, thinks I, and a dirty hound nor one half a man. But he sure was plum Duff for me.

So I kids myself into light and care-free manners, as was my custom, and holds her soft little arm tight, like I will never let it go.

"Will we go to Valparaiso, my dear?" I says.

"Be split if we do!" says she.

the Messenger



A Complete Novelette by W. C. Robertson & H. Bedford-Jones

THERE is no need of detailing how I came home again to the old house in the sand-lots, to find that my poor mother was taking in lodgers to support herself and her sister. The two of them lived up in the garret, renting out all the rest of the house. Even Aunt Nora's little place down the shore was leased, and the two poor women were roosting up in that bare attic, scrimping along for bare life and trying desperately to make both ends meet.

I changed all that, you may be sure, before I had been home an hour. Think of coming home after four years of wandering, to such conditions!

"Your aunt hasn't been very well lately, Craig," said my mother, dabbing happily at her eyes. "I'm terribly sorry you have to find things this way. I think we can make room for a cot under the south gable if you're not too proud to put up with us, dear."

Never a word, mind you, about money or expenses or food. Just plain glad to see me in spite of everything. For ten minutes they talked ahead and then I opened up the grip and showed them what was inside.

I thought they would faint for a while. Then—

"Craig, did—did you come by it honestly?" faltered my poor mother.

"Honestly?"

I let out a great laugh and caught her up in a hug.

"By the gods, I came by it as honestly as ever man came by gold! And now we're going to have a house-cleaning. You'll be back in your own rightful places, you two, within half an hour. I'm going to send your gentlemen lodgers packing in short order——"

"But, Craig!" interrupted Aunt Nora fearfully. "They—they rent by the week and we have no right to eject them after taking their money. You know, by law——"

"Law be cursed!" I said, laughing. "Play with the gold while I'm gone. Here, wait."

I thrust a handful of the gold into my pocket and went down-stairs, leaving them to cry in each other's arms.

To tell the honest truth, I did wince a little on the way down. If those two women ever suspected just how that gold had been come by, I believe they'd never have touched it. But I told no lies. Did ever man come by gold, sudden gold, hard, round, yellow gold, with any degree of honesty?

Never mind; it caused me no loss of sleep. I had sweated over half the Orient for that gold. I had slaved and bullied and fought for it, from Vladivostok to Bombay but, thank the Lord, I hadn't schemed for it. Nobody could ever call Craig Day a thief or a swindler.

One can't deny that there had been rough work at times; yet, otherwise, why had I been blessed with a thick skull and a bunch of muscles? That affair in Celebes for example, with the Dutchmen and the oil-wells, and Ike Hastings from St. Louis, and the Chinese tong who thought they had first rights to the oil. Ah, well, poor Hastings was dead, and the others were as leaves in an Autumn wind. Here I was home again. Nothing else mattered.

The thought of those two poor women crying for joy in each other's arms perhaps made me a little wee bit brutal in the way I went about it. Going down-stairs, I sought my mother's room first of all—the room where she had loved to sit and look out over the sea and the lonely sand-lots.

I knocked at the door, got no answer, and opened. There was a stifled cry and I saw an

angry young woman jump behind a screen as the lock burst in.

"Get out of here!" she ordered in a shrill voice, peering over the top.

"Not yet, ma'am," I said. "It's nine o'clock. I want you out o' this room by noon, if you please——"

"Help!" she sung out, then swore at me. "As sure as I've got a friend on the police-force, you'll do time for this. You're no gentleman!"

"I don't claim to be," I said, and laughed as I tossed a twenty-dollar boy over the screen. "Take that, miss, and there'll be another if you're out at noon. My name's Day, this house is mine, and I'm occupying it at noon. No hard feelings."

I withdrew, leaving her silenced by the gold. Out in the hall I nearly ran over a man who seemed to think I was a burglar or something.

"What's this, what's this?" he cried excitedly. "Is Miss Matilda calling for help? Put up your hands, there! Explain your business in that room——"

He waved a gun at me, so I wasted no time on him. The gun did not go off, fortunately for my mother's peace of mind. This chivalric person looked pretty sick when I held him up against the wall and talked to him.

"I gave the lady until noon," I concluded, "but you're all ready to hike, and you've been rude. So hike, friend! Your trunk will be on the sidewalk when you come back, and if you make any fuss I'll have you pinched for assaulting me with that gun."

I gave the gun back to him and went on, cleaning out the other rats. It became evident, however, that the place could never be reoccupied by my mother in its present condition. Everything was dingy, the carpets were threadbare, and the house needed a complete overhauling. Meantime, the lodgers were getting out.

The last room was my own—my own room, where I had kept my own shelf of boy's books, where I had seen my father for the last time. My room, dear with a thousand memories. No one answered my knock. The door was locked. A surge of anger rising in me, I put my shoulder to it and entered. And this entry came within a half-inch of being my death.

Perhaps some intuition warned me, held me back the scant second of time that saved me. The knife flashed down past my face, sang by my ear like a bee in wing, ripped the cloth of my coat sleeve and went down into the floor beside my foot. For an instant I stood there in dead fright, since the room was all empty and clear before me. Then I looked up.

It was an easily constructed affair, to one who had the knack—a stout spring of steel, connected by a wire across the door. The lodger had the right to lay such a trap, perhaps; yet the thought of my mother entering that room made me burn. Not that she would have entered when the door was locked, but—well, you understand.

I stooped and drew the knife from the floor, where it was buried for a good half-inch. The blade was six inches, the haft five. The blade was thin steel, the haft light bamboo—an ideal throwing-weapon, you comprehend. Upon the brass cap of the haft there was scratched what looked like a fish-hook.

Examining closer, it became evident that after setting the knife in its holder above the door, one could leave the room, close the door and then set the strap by pulling the wire which had been run through the door-frame. This tenant, I reflected, must have been here for some time; at least, so it looked at the moment. I turned my attention to the room, with a glow of interest in this gentleman.

Somewhat to my surprize; absolutely the only evidence of tenancy was a trunk. Now one must have socks, shoes, perhaps a toothbrush—never a sign of any here. The dresser was empty. This lodger lived, if he lived at all, from his trunk.

The trunk, however, quickened my interest. It was a foreign affair of wicker, covered over with a very heavy canvas and painted black. The lock was double. It was unlike any lock I had ever seen—and I have seen and tampered with several—but something about it had a hint of Chinese. Then, upon the end of the trunk and neatly stenciled in white letters, I saw the name "James Death."

There was a name for you. Any man placed far above the common herd and mingling only with the elect might carry it. It was hard to fancy any man with that name, however, going up and down the world and mingling with other men; that is, men who did things. He would either live up to that name and be a killer, or else he'd have another name in six weeks.

"If there's another man in this country by that name, I'll eat my hat!" I said to myself. "And that knife—*hm!* Out you go, James Death, and your knife to boot!"

I picked up the trunk, which was fairly heavy, and lifted it out of the room. Our house was at the ocean-fringe of San Francisco—that line of sand-lots south of the park, at the end of things—and we had a paved street which ended fifty feet beyond the house. There was no other building near by, except Aunt Nora's bungalow over toward the shore, three blocks distant.

THERE was considerable commotion in the house by this time. I carried the trunk out to the street and set it down by the steps. Then, taking the knife from my pocket, I drove it in through the top of the trunk—drove it in to the hilt and left it.

"And if you don't like it, Mr. James Death," I said grimly, "you just come along and interview me about it!"

This accomplished, I telephoned for a taxicab from the corner drug-store, then went up to the attic and got mother and Aunt Nora together.

"This house will be empty today," I said. "Your bungalow, Aunt Nora, I'll attend to a bit later——"

"Craig, you must not!" intervened Aunt Nora in dismay. "I've leased it to two very nice young men, an Englishman and his friend, and they're paying well——"

"Nothing doing," I cut in firmly. "When my cash gives out and I'm gone, then do as you like. But while I'm on the job with money in my pocket, my women-folks aren't going to live in an attic and rent rooms. Mother, who's the man in my room down-stairs?"

Poor mother went white.

"You—Craig—he wasn't there?"

"He was not," I said. "What about him? Is he a big bully?"

"No. He's a—a little man." She stopped right there but I saw that she was afraid to say very much. "I—I wish you wouldn't interfere with him——"

"Nothing doing," I said again. "This is my funeral! Now, you two ladies get your jewelry together. We're going for a ride and you're not coming back for two or three weeks."

"What do you mean?"

They stared at me, while I fished more gold from the grip and filled my pockets. They must have thought I'd gone mad until I laughed and explained.

"I'm going to renovate here and you're going to have a rest, a complete rest. I'm going to ship both of you off to a mountain resort. First, we're going to chase down Post Street in a taxi and buy black silk dresses and lace nighties and things like that—all we can find. Hurry up and pack your jewelry, now; the taxi will be here directly."

My Lord, how they fluttered and protested and how happy they were. Just like two kids, those women. If I had several million dollars I'd like nothing better than to go around poking into other people's business and making them happy.

Well, in half an hour the three of us drove away, leaving much weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth in our wake. I had discovered without asking any direct questions that James Death was an old and wrinkled man, rather small and bent, an invalid. That was all, and I dismissed the matter.

We had an interesting time, working our way along toward Market Street and the ferry. When we got there, mother and Aunt Nora had each a trunk crammed with all their hearts desired and more. I had ordered paint and other things sent to the house, had men coming to measure for carpets and so forth and was pretty well satisfied. It was four o'clock when I kissed mother and Aunt Nora good-by and saw them aboard a ferry bound for the mountains and mineral-waters and rest. Then I started home.

II

FIVE o'clock saw me at home. Every bird had flown. The only thing left in sight was that trunk belonging to James Death, who had evidently not shown up. I brought it up on the porch out of decency, since the nights were fog-thick.

I wandered about the house. The kitchen and back rooms had been let as a housekeeping-apartment. They were bare of everything. The realization smote me that I had brought home no grub, and there was not an eating-place in miles. Still, there was a corner grocery some blocks distant, and I need not starve. Then came the recollection of Aunt Nora's bungalow. Seizing my cap, I shot out of the back door.

You must not think that my actions were crazy. Our place was fairly close to the Esplanade, so that most of our lodgers were hangers-on of the cafés and other establishments of that section. I did not care for them at all. The thought of Aunt Nora's neat, pretty little bungalow rented to cabaret people infuriated me.

I must have gone storming along over the sand rather gustily, for as I approached the bungalow with its neat hedge and its large garage, a man appeared at the garage door and eyed me, then turned and said something. Another man joined him and both watched my advent. In turn, I watched them and slowed my steps a bit.

Give me the grace of knowing a man when I see one. The red-headed chap who had first observed me I set down for the lesser of the two. The other was a slender fellow who must have topped my six-foot-two by another two inches; he had cropped dark hair, mustache, a face like a knife-blade—keen and virile and chin out—and his eyes told me that he was as good a man as I and perhaps better. I liked his looks at once.

None the less, I was here on business. So I came straight up the drive and halted before the two and set forth my errand.

"Good evening. My name's Craig Day. My aunt is the owner of this property. I've just come home and I want to know if you gentlemen will vacate at once."

Redhead gaped at me in amazement. The big chap looked rather annoyed.

"I fancy there's some mistake," he drawled, surveying me with a cool blue eye. "We have leased the property for six months. There's a

month yet to run. My name is Kilgore; this is my friend Mr. McAuliffe. Since our lease has been paid in advance——"

"It's not a question of money, gentlemen," I responded, nettled by his cool survey. "I've just come home to find my mother and aunt sitting in a garret and living by the rental of their homes. It isn't square and I won't have it. They have some right to enjoy the last years of their lives in the sort of home they——"

"Quite right, Mr. Day," broke in Kilgore. "But we took this place to conduct certain experiments, which are now nearing a conclusion. Further, we have dealt throughout with your aunt, and while you may have every right to speak for her, I would much rather continue dealing with her. Of course, if she wishes us to leave——"

"I sent 'em off to the mountains this afternoon," I rejoined, "so you'll have to deal with me. I've got the big house cleared out already, thank Heaven!"

"We obsairved the exodus," and Mr. McAuliffe grinned. His accent was very Scotch. "But ye'll no find us vera tractable persons, laddie. We'll aye stand on our richts!"

"Be quiet, Mac," said Kilgore. His blue eyes bored into me. "I say, Day, there's no need to get spiffy about this thing. Suppose you have tea with us. We'll talk over the matter amicably, what? I've been going it rather hard and I fancy a cup of tea would buck me up. Mac, be a good chap and lock up the garage, will you?"

I found myself going to the house with Kilgore; the man had a way with him. I had begun to regret my hasty action. The man was a gentleman. Except from a standpoint of sentiment my position was dead wrong. Yet he was calmly taking me in to tea!

Before I realized it, I was warming to Kilgore. He explained that they had turned the garage into a workshop and had their meals sent out from a hotel in the city each day; they had no real need of a car, as the line to Twin Peaks Tunnel was within easy reach. It struck me as a trifle odd that they should have their meals sent from a hotel in town, but of course I made no comment.

I found Aunt Nora's dining-table spread with a snowy cloth. Kilgore uncovered a large dish of excellent sandwiches, set out cigarets and excused himself to set the kettle going in the kitchen.

A careless man is ever prone to the temptation of a snowy table-cloth. As I sat, I picked up a spoon and idly creased the linen. What fancy sped my hand, I know not, but I drew with the spoon-tip that same fish-hook figure which had been on the brass cap of Death's knife. I guessed that it meant something, and yet I knew of no written language that had any such form, though it was not unlike Tibetan.

McAuliffe came into the room and dropped into a chair. Kilgore followed a moment later. All stiffness had vanished among us, and with some bruskerie—for I never like apologies—I asked them to forget my words.

"When I came over here," I said, "it was with the thought that you were like the tenants at the house. You're not. Just forget the whole affair, if you will. I was a bit carried away with getting home and all that. You're an Englishman, Kilgore?"

"Canadian," he responded. "Mac here is American like yourself."

"Like myself is right," and I grinned across the table at Mac. "My father was Scotch and he had the same lowland burr."

KILGORE rose and switched on the electric lights, as fog was rolling in and darkening the sunset. The English blood in him showed when he pulled down the shades, although the house was in a lonely enough situation. At this instant a telephone-bell rang and McAuliffe answered the call. The instrument was on a stand in the corner of the dining-room.

"Hello!" said Mac. Then abruptly he spoke in Hindustani:

"No, nothing new, Sir Fandi. You will not be out tonight? Yes, he is here."

Mac turned with a lift of his brows to Kilgore. The latter rose. At this I put out my hand.

"One minute, Kilgore. I'd better say that I understand the tongue."

Kilgore gave me a half-smile and a glance from his blue eyes, then nodded and went to the instrument. Whether because of my warning or not, he said scarcely a word, but listened to some message from the other end.

McAuliffe came back to the table, gave me two or three glances, then picked up a spoon and began tracing lines on the cloth. Now the lights were overhead. As he sat, he caught the shadowed lines of the figure I had traced. My first intimation of this was when he caught his breath and half-sprang out of his chair. Next thing I knew, he was holding down a gun on me, anger blazing in his face.

"Kilgore!" His voice bit out as the Canadian hung up and turned. "Look here—there's the devil to pay. This chap——"

He pointed to the figure on the linen. Kilgore looked at it, then came around to his chair, dropped into it, and his eyes glinted on me like a blue sword. I took a cigaret and lighted it.

"You chaps," I said, "are either stark crazy, or else—I don't know what! If you want a row, I'll give it to you. If not, cut out the comedy and bring on the tea."

Kilgore looked at McAuliffe. "Don't be a silly ass, Mac. Put up the gun."

"But there it is—the sign of the ten——"

"Put up the gun."

McAuliffe shoved the automatic into his pocket, swore and sat down.

"Mr. Day," said Kilgore, picking his words, "did you draw that figure on the cloth with any purpose?"

"No," I said bluntly. "What does it mean?"

"It's a Mongolian word, and it means 'ten'." Kilgore looked at his pal. "Mac, get the tea like a good fellow."

Redhead rose and obeyed. Kilgore must have had quite a turn, for from his first glimpse of that Mongol word his face had looked stern and set. I said nothing and waited until the tea was poured. Then Kilgore, stirring his cup, took up the gauntlet.

"Would you mind telling us, Day, how you happened to draw that figure?"

He was very courteous, but there was steel in his words.

"Not a bit," I answered. "It was scratched on the handle of Death's knife——"

Mac dropped an oath and sat back in his chair, his face white. Kilgore started.

"Death's knife!" he repeated. "Death's knife!"

Under those blue eyes I realized that I was closer to death this moment than ever I had been in my own house. I knew Kilgore's sort, and knew that something queer was afoot.

"Easy, you two!" I warned them. "This stuff is all Greek to me. This chap Death was one of the lodgers at the other house——"

I told them the whole story as I knew it. And, while I talked, Kilgore sat and watched me with those piercing eyes of his, unmoved and calm; but McAuliffe was gripping the table-edge, and if ever there was murderous hate in a man's face, it sat in his. Not hatred for me, I realized.

"What room in your house did this man occupy?" asked Kilgore, when I was through.

"The back room on the right-hand side."

"Ah! And the window overlooks this bungalow?"

I nodded. This question gave me the clue, the connection between these two men and the man James Death. Kilgore looked at McAuliffe and Mac at him; between them passed a wordless message.

"Looks like a cursed queer name, that," I said reflectively. "I can't imagine any sane American or Englishman using it."

A twisted smile curved Kilgore's thin, aristocratic lips.

"The man is not an Anglo-Saxon," he answered. "He chose the name in some ignorance of our ethnic customs, I fancy. Day, you've done us a tremendous favor with this information of yours. From the moment you told us that you understood Hindustani, I knew you were all right. I regret that, just at present, we're not able to make explanations to you, but we are not the only persons involved. We have a friend——"

"No harm," growled McAuliffe, "in warning him."

"Righto," assented Kilgore. "This man who calls himself James Death, was at one time an associate of ours in another country, Day. He left us there for dead. I'd strongly advise you to mind your step if you have any dealings with him. You understand?"

I nodded and came to my feet.

"All right, gentlemen; thanks for the warning. Don't worry about the explanations. I have no desire to pry into your affairs whatever. Perhaps you'd like to know whether the fellow comes back to get his trunk?"

McAuliffe grunted. Kilgore gave me a thin, thin smile.

"We'll know, thanks." Those three words were enough to show me that Mr. Death was in for a bad quarter of an hour if he ever ventured into this neighborhood—now!

I took my departure, Kilgore showing me out. My house was quite dark; not a light to show that Death or any one else was there. As I left the bungalow, I heard the voice of McAuliffe raised excitedly in Hindustani at the telephone.

"That you, Fandi Singh? Get here as quick as you can. Death has been watching us."

I shivered as I walked over the grassy sand toward my own house. There was something ominous in such words, something suggestive of the double *entendre* of that name, Death. But I was glad that I had met Kilgore and Mac. They were real men.

III

IF I took the darkness of my house for surety that James Death had not returned, I was reckoning without my guest. However. . . .

I stumbled over the grassy, weedy sand-lots toward home. A heavy fog had swept in and had brought darkness with it, through which rolled the boom of the surf from the beach.

This was a rum affair, and no mistake. Kilgore and McAuliffe were linked to a third man, a man named Sir Fandi Singh—from the name either a Sikh or a Rajput of India. Other links bound them to James Death and a link had caught me into the affair. Kilgore had said that Death was not an Anglo-Saxon; what, then, could he be? Did the Mongolian character for "ten" have any bearing here? And again, what experiments were Kilgore and Mac carrying on in the bungalow or garage?

Somewhere, something sniffed big of world-trails and high emprise.

I missed my way in the obscurity, failed of the back entrance and went ahead to the front of my house. At the top of the porch stairs

I struck something and went a-sprawl, cursing the obstruction. Without waiting to see what it was, I picked myself up, opened the front door and switched on the lights.

In front of the door lay the paints and painting-materials I had ordered that day. I carried them into the house and considered what was next to be done. All told, I had not been absent over an hour or so. The evening lay before me, and being of an energetic turn of mind, I determined to fall to work at my redecorating without further delay.

The kitchen was the immediate base of operations. This required fresh white paint from truck to keelson; after the paint dried, new linoleum could be laid. Three hours of steady work ought to eliminate the kitchen from further calculation. With this in mind I laid aside coat and collar, got out my brushes and picked up a can-opener to attack a can of white enamel.

I had set the opener to the tin and was about to puncture it, when a sound halted me.

A sound? More like a shock. You try dropping a hundred-pound sack of wheat on an upper floor of an empty house and you will get some idea of how hard a man's body falls when it does fall. There was no mistaking that soft, heavy thud which fairly shook the house. Some one was up-stairs. Then came the distinct slam of a door—and silence.

For all my listening, there came no further sound—not a footstep, not the creak of a board. Abandoning my operations, I went out to the front hall, then at the foot of the stairs halted. Instead of going up, I went to the door and looked outside. The trunk belonging to James Death had disappeared. I had given it no thought when entering the house.

"Who the devil's up-stairs?"

With this query in my mind I switched on the upper hall lights and ascended. The dead silence of the house puzzled me. It was that intense silence which only comes upon a house in which no soul is moving, even breathing.

The upper hall was empty. I stood there staring about. In the silence I could have sworn that no living person was in the house.

"Anybody here?" I called. Only the echo of my own voice responded and I swore at the silence. I looked into one or two rooms—deserted and empty. It occurred to me that some of my ousted tenants might be trying some sort of revenge for the ousting. I had been gone since before noon. All the afternoon the house had stood deserted. Upon my return I had not even gone up-stairs. One or a dozen persons might be in hiding here.

That there was no one down-stairs I was certain. I went to the door that led up to the attic. It was locked, as I had left it, but I had certainly heard a door slam up here somewhere. That narrowed down the matter to a definite basis. I looked at the doors opening on the hall, and three of them were closed.

The first two opened upon empty rooms. Then I turned to the third and realized that it was my own room, the room occupied by James Death. Upon the instant I felt convinced that here lay the answer to the question; that when I opened this door, I would find something strange and sinister.

And I hesitated at the door, for my pistol lay up-stairs in my grip. Then I knocked but had no answer. Angered by my own weakness, I twisted the knob and flung open the door, at the same instant keeping back. That morning's escape had taught me a lesson. The room showed only blackness, for the hall light did not reach it. I stepped inside, felt for the switch and lighted the room.

For perhaps three minutes I stood there, absolutely motionless, trying to figure out what had happened here.

Near the window which overlooked the bungalow, James Death's trunk was standing open. Therefore, Death had returned, found no one about and, being ignorant of my return, had calmly brought his trunk back to his room. Also, he had replaced the knife over the door.

At my feet lay the body of a man, face down. He had entered the room with head down, hastily and furtively. The knife had caught him at the juncture of neck and shoulder; must have killed him instantly. He had fallen forward, probably had grasped at the door and caused it to slam behind him.

"No!" I muttered. "That door slammed *after* the man had fallen and he could not have done it himself by any possibility."

Then I looked again at the position of the knife, which was driven in clear to the haft. With this, all my reasoning showed wrong. The man could not have been killed from above. The knife had been slid into him as he looked into the room. The murderer had then let him fall forward, and slammed the door, and ....

At this point in my reflections I glanced hastily over my shoulder and closed the door behind me. The murderer was in the house and I preferred to have an inch of wood at my back.

FORTUNATELY my Paisley father bequeathed me an excellent cool head in emergencies; it was apt to be hot at other times. Whoever had done this deed knew that I was in the house and alone. The size of the body on the floor was very large, as large as my own. Therefore, this was not James Death, as evidently James Death had done the work himself. What, then, would come next on his program?

"This chap is no fool," I told myself. "If he could get the police in a hurry, the chances are about even that I would be convicted of this murder on circumstantial evidence. A

grand little plot for a detective story! Only things don't always work out that way in real life. If I'm right, the gentleman will be out of the house by now."

I turned, leaving the lights going, and went out into the hall. Sure enough, I felt a breath of cold salt air the first thing. A window had been opened since I stepped into that room.

I knew what window was open, instantly. Often enough I had used it myself, when I had wanted to slip out of the house unheard, as a boy. Without hesitation I went to the adjoining room, turned on the light and found the window open. Directly under this window was the roof of the back porch with an easy descent to the ground. Not being a fool, I did not go near the window but turned off the light again and halted in the hall.

"The gentleman is gone," I reflected, cursing my own thick-headed folly in having missed him. "It looks to me as if my one best bet were to call in Kilgore and his friends. This seems to be more of their funeral than mine."

At this moment the front door-bell rang, shrilling through the house with a suddenness that startled me.

The police—already? Impossible. Death had been gone only a few moments at best; he could not have set them on my trail yet, even if my conjectures as to his course of action were correct. Perhaps the fellow had the effrontery to slide out the back window, then come around to the front door and—but no; he had a pass-key. This, more likely, was a visit from some other lodger who had forgotten some effects.

I went down the stairs, prepared for anything.

The front doors were heavily curtained, so that not until I had opened them did I see who was outside. Then, with an exclamation of relief, I greeted Kilgore and McAuliffe. With them was a third—a dark man, bearded, his face proud and keen. I knew who this was even before Kilgore's introduction.

"Mr. Day, I'd like to introduce my friend Sir Fandi Singh—a Rajput."

"Delighted," I said, meeting a firm hand-grip. "But come inside; don't stand out here! You met no one?"

Kilgore's brows lifted. "No. Why?"

"The devil to pay and no pitch hot!" I slammed the front door. "I was just deciding to run over and see you gentlemen. What fetched you if I may ask?"

"We had decided to give you a little more information," and Kilgore smiled.

"Aye," said Mac heartily. "We liked the hook o' your neb, Mr. Day. And when Sir Fandi said aye to it, we came along."

"Well, you came at the right moment," I responded. "There's been——"

The shrill whang of a bell cut me short. The telephone stood by us in this lower hall and I moved toward it with a premonition of the message.

"Excuse me, gentlemen."

"Park 1199?" asked a voice.

"Yes."

"Police headquarters speaking, Ingleside station. Anything wrong there?"

"Nothing wrong here," I responded. "Why?"

"We just had a message that there had been a murder out your way. Know anything about it?"

"Murder? Certainly not. This is Mr. Day speaking. I've been here with three of my friends for a couple of hours. No one sent any message from here."

The sergeant swore slightly.

"We had a 'phone half a minute ago. It sounded fishy——"

"Ah!" I exclaimed. "I threw out a couple of bum lodgers here today. I expect one of them is trying to make a little trouble. But send out a man, sergeant, if you like, and take a look around."

"We've no men to spare on no-name information like this," snapped the sergeant. "Sorry we troubled you, Mr. Day. Good night."

Hanging up, I looked around to see all three visitors looking fixedly at me.

"Well," I said cheerfully, "somebody has to get his hands dirty tonight, that's sure. Regular old nickel-novel stuff, too. One goes ahead with the spade, two come along with the corpse, and the fourth acts as covering and protecting convoy."

The Rajput's white teeth flashed.

"I gather," he observed, "that you have had some excitement over here?"

"Not me," I answered, and chuckled. "Somebody else had the excitement. He got your friend Death's knife in the back of his neck, and he's up-stairs now. I figured that Death would make this kind of a play, so when the police called up——"

Kilgore's blue eyes flashed.

"We'll get on, Day, we'll get on!" he said, and clapped me on the shoulder.

"Then let's move up-stairs," I said. "We can't take chances on that desk sergeant, and we want no police in this business, I fancy."

"Right," said Kilgore, cool as a cucumber. "So it's murder, eh? A stranger?"

"I haven't inspected him" was my response. "Maybe you'll know him, though."

They followed me in silence.

IV

THE four of us stood in my room, with lights on and blinds down, and surveyed things. McAuliffe looked calm enough, but blazed with excitement under the surface. Sir Fandi Singh sat down on the bed and lighted a cigaret, saying nothing but watching us

sharply. Kilgore and I turned over the body.

"And that's the end o' Hat Shui, puir deil!" said McAuliffe.

"You know him?" I asked.

"We have met him," said Kilgore dryly. No other explanation.

I studied the dead man. He was built very large, wore clothes of cheap quality, and held, or had held, a revolver in his hand. *Rigor mortis*, contrary to the belief of some folks, is slow in its action, starts in at the throat and goes downward. So the revolver had fallen from Hat Shui's hand.

The features of the man were peculiar. They were not Chinese, yet were somewhat tawny. The long mustache and tuft of beard had been gilded; quite freshly, too. I have seen some strange things, but this was the first time I had ever heard of a man gilding his whiskers. When I said as much, Kilgore smiled and Mac chuckled.

"Mair than likely," said the redhead, "ye'll learn ither strange things, friend Day! Hae ye searched him?"

At this suggestion Kilgore and I went through the chap. Buckled under his sleeve was a knife, twin brother to that knife of Death's which had killed him. Otherwise, he seemed to have nothing in his pockets, until Kilgore drew out his hand and showed a small roll of bills. Among the bills, flashing like drops of frozen blood, were half a dozen small rubies.

Small? Well, size is of no great moment. These stones were not large, but they were of the richest pigeon-blood hue. The sight of them held me astonished, but I was more astonished by the behavior of my companions.

Kilgore poked at them with one finger, almost contemptuously. McAuliffe looked at them and nodded to himself carelessly. Sir Fandi Singh gave them only a glance, then rose and crossed the room to deposit his cigaret-ashes somewhere. Kilgore dropped the money and rubies into my hand.

"Take 'em, Day. We don't need 'em; your share of the loot."

No man has to tell me such a thing twice, and I pocketed the stones. Now it was that Sir Fandi Singh spoke up. He had an incisive manner of speech, deadly serious, and he had been figuring things out in his mind all the while, evidently.

"Everything is very plain," he observed, with a sweep of his hand about the room. "While Mr. Day was away this afternoon, Death returned home. He found every one gone. Seeing his trunk outside, he brought it back to the room——"

"That must have been tonight, while I was over at the bungalow talking to you chaps," I struck in. "The trunk was outside the house when I got home about five."

Fandi Singh nodded and went on.

"There was no one to explain to Death, and perhaps he thought that we had discovered his presence. He began to watch us. Beyond a doubt—" and here the Rajput's tone became grave—"he has had the bungalow under observation for some time. He has been watching your tests, Kilgore."

The tall Canuck nodded. That James Death had been doing some watching was clear. His open trunk showed only a mass of dirty linen. On the table beside it, the table at the window, was set up a little rack that held a pair of prismatic binoculars. With such glasses Death could have seen every detail of what was doing at the bungalow or garage.

"He was seeking some way to strike," commented Kilgore.

"Exactly," assented Fandi Singh. "And he knew that we were making ready to return to the Ten Dromedaries some day. While he was watching, he saw Mr. Day go to the bungalow and probably guessed at the *entente* being established. He promptly checked off Day as an enemy. At this moment something distracted his attention and he left the room——"

"The painting-materials!" I interjected. "I had ordered some; they arrived while I was at the bungalow and were left at the front door."

Fandi Singh nodded and went on with his inexorable logic:

"Very good. Death left the room at the ring of the bell but did not open the front door. While he was gone he probably got some warning that Hat Shui was in the house; he concealed himself, followed the Mongol, and as Hat Shui entered the room, stabbed the priest in the neck. We know the rest."

"So Hat Shui was a priest, and a Mongol!" I exclaimed. "Was he a friend of yours?"

They all looked at me with varying degrees of amusement in their faces.

"Not exactly," returned Kilgore. "Hat Shui came to kill James Death—had been following him for a year or more."

"Do Mongols gild their whiskers?" I struck in.

"That was for the benefit of James Death," answered Fandi Singh. "It was to apprize him that Hat Shui, an emissary of the Ten——"

"See here," intervened Kilgore quickly, "we'll never get anywhere like this! I say, Day, we've concluded to give you the whole story. We'd better start in at the right end and go through with it. I suppose you've never been in the Gobi desert?"

"You suppose wrong," I returned, with a grin at their startled interest.

"Aye?" said Mac, rubbing his chin. "And ye'll ken the romance and the butterflies and things that the writer-chaps tell aboot?" He eyed me with a wary look as he spoke.

"The butterflies are there," I grunted. "I've

treated men who saw 'em—aromatic spirits of ammonia is the remedy. Romance? I don't see any romance in riding with your guts gritty all day and sleeping with your head in a leather bag so you won't wake up dead. Nix on the romance! I went there on business. And if I'm forgiven previous sin, I'll never sin again."

They laughed at this. Kilgore was about to speak, when I held up my hand.

"Gentlemen, I like you fine, and I'd like to hear the story; but I'll confess that I'm a wee bit nervous at the present moment. Your friend Death is at liberty, and he's a swift actor. I suggest that we put Mr. Hat Shui out of sight before we do any more talking."

"Oh, aye!" assented McAuliffe promptly. "I misdoot me——"

"Righto," said Kilgore, leaning over. "Catch hold!"

He had the body by the feet, and I caught hold of the shoulders. We carried the corpse out into the hall and down the front stairs to the lower hall, and so into the kitchen and the rear porch. There we paused.

If you'll remember, I was in my shirt sleeves. Snuggling Hat Shui's head up against my breast made it inevitable that I should get quite a bit of blood over my shirt and arms. This recalled to me that there must be a mess up-stairs.

"Let him wait here a bit," I said. "If you gentlemen will scout around, I expect you'll find a spade or something in the vicinity. My mother was always trying her best to raise some radishes in the back-yard, so there must be implements. I'll run up-stairs and clean up the floor—keep things straight as we go."

I SLIPPED up-stairs the back way. It was no lie about being nervous. With all these things happening, and that suit-case full of gold in the attic, my nerves were on edge. I went straight to the attic room and dumped all the gold into a little old trunk of my mother's, locked it, and then came down to my own room again.

Within five minutes I was getting the floor cleared up with a wet towel. Naturally this work did not improve the condition of the towel, or of me either. To get rid of the rag temporarily, I went to the open trunk and tossed it in with the unclean linen.

A little box, in the corner of the trunk, caught my eye. I was thinking of the rubies, and it occurred to me that here might be a cache of stones; anything was likely, with this sort of crowd. I stooped over and took up the box, which looked like a large pill-box. One sniff of it told me the story, however, and when I opened it I was rather disgusted to find it filled with opium-pellets.

This gave me another line on my lodger—an opium-eater. Where he could get the stuff was a mystery, for in this country it's hardly made any more except as smoking-gum. I slid the box into my pocket and went down-stairs.

My three friends were standing over Hat Shui, whom they had brought back into the kitchen.

"I say, Day!" spoke up Kilgore. "There's not a sign of a spade around here!"

"All right," I returned cheerfully. "There must be something to dig with. If not, use the two knives——"

At this instant the door-bell rang. It was a long, hard ring, as from a hand that did not intend to be kept waiting all night. I must have started, for McAuliffe grinned wickedly. This made me angry.

"Beat it outside!" I motioned to the back door and caught up my coat.

"Lay hold, Mac." Kilgore stepped above the body. "We'll get it out on the rear steps."

I nodded. "Good enough. That's the best we can do."

Shutting the kitchen door behind me, I passed through the hall. If that confounded Death had really managed to get the police on the trail, they would insist on looking around. Then I came to a halt as the voice of Fandi Singh floated after me.

"Day! If anything goes wrong—I've a car on the street behind, near the bungalow."

"Thanks," I returned, and went on, buttoning up my coat tightly. At the front door my worst fears were realized.

I opened the door to confront two gentlemen whose hard-jawed features and general air bespoke the plain-clothes man. None the less, they were polite enough.

"Mr. Day?"

I admitted the fact.

"We're from the Ingleside station—the sarge called you up a little while ago?"

"About the murder?" I forced a smile. "But he said——"

"Yep. Right afterward that no-name guy called up again. Said we'd find a Chink's body in a room on the upper floor, gave us the location and all. Say, what's all this about?"

I opened the door wider to admit them if they so desired.

"Well, I chucked out a couple of lodgers today and I imagine they're trying to make a bit of trouble. Want to look over the place?"

The first detective glanced at his partner, who nodded.

"If you don't mind, yes. Just to make sure it's a fake, you know——"

"Come along, then; the house is yours, gentlemen."

I flatter myself that my manner deceived them completely. They entered and I led the way up-stairs. It was plain that this accursed James Death had done his work thoroughly, for at the head of the stairs they went directly

to my own room and stood in the doorway after turning on the lights.

"Looks like a hophead's yarn, eh?" said one, and entered the room.

Then I went cold—I remembered that confounded towel! Is there anything in telepathy? I can't say. But I do know that this plain-clothes man went righta cross the room and took one look at the trunk.

The thing occurred so quickly that I was taken off guard, swept from my feet. The second man, beside me, must have caught some unuttered warning from the bearing of his companion; at all events, he simply turned and grabbed me by the coat before the first man had even uttered a word. Naturally I pulled away. My coat buttons went one-two-three and there I was, in all the glory of my bloody shirt.

All I heard was one startled oath, as I slammed the door and went out of the house the same way James Death had gone.

V

STRANGERS in the house, the two detectives had no chance of getting me. They did not even know which way I had gone. I slid off the back-porch roof and streaked it across the sand-lots, while the house behind me began to blaze with lights and to sound with excited voices.

I headed for the bungalow. Just before I reached its street, a number of figures showed in the fog ahead, and I heard Kilgore's voice.

"Day? What's up?"

"Bungled it," I returned. "—— it all! They'll find the body and go after me. Too bad we couldn't have hidden it."

"We did it," said Kilgore calmly. "At least, we're on our way to the beach with it. You run along with Fandi Singh. No time to lose, now! Good luck. See you later."

There were men for you—the right sort, the real sort! It was none of their funeral, but they had made it so, quite literally. I followed Fandi Singh to a big car, and in two minutes we were heading away from there without lights.

"Where will you go?" said the Rajput, after we were two blocks away and he had switched on his lights.

"Anywhere down-town. How'll I get in touch with you later?"

He handed me a card and I put it into my pocket. Then he reached back into the tonneau and shoved a big rain-coat into my lap. That man never wasted words. He needed no explanation. He had a brain.

As for me, I lay back and enjoyed the silence as we swept over the Twin Peaks Boulevard.

It was, you will say, a strange thing for an innocent man to flee in this way. If you knew as much of the world as I do, you'd never take a chance; anyway, I wouldn't. Since Kilgore would get rid of the *corpus delicti* in the surf or under the sand, the chances were good that I would never be looked up for murder.

However, I would be looked up, and if they found me, I would be locked up. That was certain. The whole affair would seem cursed queer to the police, and rightly so. They would trail me and look around for a corpse, you bet. And the papers would be full of theories, and my poor mother would have heart-failure up there in the mountains when she read them. If, on the other hand, they failed to apprehend me, they would certainly not mention the fact to the newspaper lads at all. They would look for me, right enough, but unless Hat Shui shoved a leg out of the sand to attract attention, they could prove no crime. Blood proves nothing. You can kill a man before a crowd of witnesses, but if you can make the body vanish into thin air, you're safe.

Why then did I run for it? Merely because I saw no sense in spending a week butting against police-brains and feeding lies to newspaper men, not to mention how the news-sheets might hurt my mother's feelings. Besides, there was no warranty that Hat Shui would not show up again.

"Let me out at California and Sutter," I told Sir Fandi. He nodded and turned into Haight Street. Never a word out of him.

I noted that the car was expensive, most expensive. And as Fandi Singh's hands lay on the steering-wheel, the passing lights gleamed on some remarkably fine jewels which adorned his fingers; jewels worth a small fortune. He may have noticed my glance, for now he took a pair of driving-gloves from beneath him and slipped them on. Then he spoke.

"Do you believe in telepathy?" he asked.

To me came the thought of that cursed detective, and I chuckled.

"Now and then. Why?"

"Hat Shui belonged to the finest organization of mental workers in the world."

"Ah! Theosophists?"

"No. The priests of the Ten Dromedaries."

We dodged a street-car. This was the second time I had heard my friends use this name, and it wakened some old memories in my brain.

"Look here," I said, "all that is a myth, a bit of Mongolian folk-lore! I heard all about the Ten Dromedaries place. It doesn't exist."

Fandi Singh chuckled. "Keep thinking that," he advised. "Don't let your mind work on what's happened. James Death used to belong to the organization also, and if he picks up your mental thought-waves, he'll be apt to give you away to the police. I'm warning you. Watch your mind."

Had any one else uttered such a warning, I would have sniffed in scorn. But these words from the grave Rajput startled me. His chuckle was sinister. Then I recalled the dagger

with its Mongol character and I kept silence. Before this, I've found that the impossible frequently does exist and usually at the wrong time.

Sir Fandi Singh said no more until he halted the car at the corner I had designated. Then he made a brief remark.

"Our best chance," he said, "is that James Death is so rotten with opium that his brain will be sodden without it. He was one of the priests. Turned traitor to them—that's why Hat Shui was after him. They never fail to get their man. Well, good luck! *Au revoir.*"

I bade him good night, and he sped away.

The evening was still early. I walked along California Street, the rain-coat buttoned to the throat to conceal my collarless condition, and turned into one of those hand-me-down shops that keep open for the hophead and Chinese night-trade. Having plenty of money, I bought a complete outfit from hat to shoes, then retraced my steps to one of the modest but good hotels in the neighborhood and engaged a room.

Five minutes later I was at peace with the world and indulging in a good cigar.

Privacy! It tasted fine after the lurid events of this day and evening. So far as any danger from the police was concerned, I never bothered my head on this score—not for a minute. Of course, two of them had my face in their minds, and the whole crowd would get a perfect description of me, but they would never know me again. I had no distinctive marks.

Dress in an entirely different manner. Take charcoal from a burnt match, mix with water and apply the result beneath your lip and around your eyes, and so on. Then buy a pair of these big black horn spectacles and get a close haircut. If you do the job right, you could fool your own brother. So, as I say, I had no fear of the dicks. It was a good gamble, and the betting favored me at large odds.

Dismissing this from my mind, the next thing was to take stock. I had plenty of money of my own, and the roll of bills taken from Hat Shui was in my pocket—five hundred in that. Then, the rubies, six of the little beauties. After these, the box of opium-pellets from Death's trunk. My own automatic pistol. The card which Sir Fandi Singh had given me:

> Take a bench in Union Square, near the women's reserved section on the St. Francis side of the park, between twelve and one tomorrow.

When had the Rajput scribbled this penciled instruction? Not after getting into the car, certainly. Then he must have written it immediately after I had left the three friends in the kitchen, immediately after calling to me that he had a car waiting.

"Gad, but you're a cool outfit!" I reflected admiringly. "You don't take chances. You prepare for every emergency and you act like a whip-crack. I've missed something not knowing you three chaps before. And the way Kilgore was toting that corpse out of sight, too! No lack of money."

What were they experimenting with, and why had James Death been watching them? To this, no answer.

To obey that final warning from Sir Fandi Singh, was a difficult matter.

In the Gobi? Well, I had been along the fringes of it, and naturally I had heard the stories about the temple of the Ten Dromedaries. Naturally, too, I had discounted the tales as every sensible man does, particularly if he has a drop of canny Scotch blood in his veins.

It sounded too dashed romantic, and well I knew the lack of romance in that accursed region, where every man carries his leather head-bag and the poor devils of camels will wear out a set of stout shoes in a week. No two people go into the Gobi and come out with the same story—and right. No two sections of it are alike. The buried cities are there; I've seen them. The gravel and bare rock is there. The sand is there. But romance? No, no! A good shaggy Bactrian will outstink anything on earth except another Bactrian, and where two or three of these are gathered together, I defy any sane man to find romance.

If the temple of the Ten Dromedaries did exist and the priests did exist and all the rest of it, I knew that I had better respect the warning and think about other things. So, when my cigar was finished, I shoved the whole affair out of my mind and rolled into bed.

UPON waking up in the morning it was to find myself a new man, or, rather the old Craig Day again. The temple of the Ten Dromedaries, ten priests, ten novices, ten virgins and all the rest of the farrago, flashed into my head and I broke out laughing in the midst of my bath. To think of a filthy old yellow devil, a slant-eyed Mongolian, an ignorant worshiper of images, squatting down in the sand and pulling off mental stunts that would make the combined heads of the Royal Societies go swimming!

"Nonsense!" I exclaimed cheerfully to my new shirt. "Nonsense! Craig, you've become your own sensible, sonsy self again. I must have been worked up to a nervous edge last night, and no mistake."

Cheerful? Mightily so. The stimulus of my present situation was a tonic. Not dangerous, in the least; but enough out of ordinary civilized ruts to be interesting tonic. When I was all rigged out in my new togs, I set about getting the proper shadows on my face, then went forth into the big city.

Breakfast, then a haircut, then a spectacle-shop. These three enterprises kept me at work

until nine, for I am an early riser. Slightly after nine I came sauntering into the park that lies in the heart of San Francisco, a big man with a big hat, big black specs perched on his big nose, and a big cigar to keep him company.

There were plenty of bums, time-killers and loafers occupying the benches. I caught one chap raiding a scrap-paper bin for a morning newspaper, and since he was a decent old fellow I gave him ten dollars and sent him out to my house to attend to the carpeting, painting and other details. This in itself is enough to show the mood I was in. Any fool would have known that he would give the police a description of me and that he might steal half the stuff in the place. But I cared nothing for such trifles.

I went over to the St. Francis and got a morning paper. A glance over it told me that there was no mention of any "Mysterious Mongolian Murder," so I started back across the street. Just in time, too. There was a poor chap with a stick—a shrunken little old man—who was engaged in a mixup with a cable-car and a taxicab; he didn't know which way to jump first, and the brute of a taxi-driver was bearing down on him with a grin.

Naturally impulsive, I rescued the old chap from the cable-car and planted myself, with him under my arm, in front of the taxicab. There was a grind of brakes, and the taxi-driver backed water in a hurry. I carried the old chap across the street and set him down at the park path.

Then I perceived that he was pretty well gone to pieces. He leaned on his stick, mumbling at a great rate, and his eyes darting around. One glance at his face told me that he was an opium-fiend. I would have left him then and there, except that he made a grab at my arm.

"Help me!" he said. "Help me along to a bench. I'll tell you all about it."

"About what?" I said whimsically. He chattered for a moment, then answered me.

"All of it, all of it!" he exclaimed, gripping at my arm. "Hat Shui and all of it! Only get me a pill; you never heard such a story! Get me a pill and I'll tell you."

My jaw dropped. Then my hand dropped likewise—to the pocket in which lay James Death's box of opium-pellets.

VI

I'VE read stories about the Gobi which made me want to shoot the writer, and I've also read stories where somebody takes a pipe or a pill of hop and promptly goes to sleep. You ought to hear how those boys get the laugh. I'll defy anybody to produce anybody else who can take opium and go to sleep from the opium. It simply doesn't act that way. It bucks up the brain instead of lulling it.

Well, to get back to the old chap who had mentioned Hat Shui. I guided him to a vacant bench, of which there were plenty in the shade, and we seated ourselves. He was a decently dressed fellow, and except for the peculiar hop-head complexion might have passed muster. Now, however, his nerves were flying wild and loose. I was afraid a policeman might come along and take him in as a suspect, so I fished in my pocket until I got one of the opium-pellets. Then I got my knife, cut the pellet in two and showed it to the old chap.

"Half for you now," I said, and gave it to him. "More later—when you have told me about Hat Shui. Who was he?"

He popped the pill into his mouth and surveyed me with bleary, bloodshot eyes. Except for his clothes, he looked like any broken-down old wreck who panhandles you for a dime. I really thought he had come across the name in a paper perhaps.

"Hat Shui?" he murmured vacantly. "Yes, yes! I'll tell you for more of it. He was one of the Ten, and he had formerly been the novice who arranged in Urga for the girls; you understand! He knew the outside world. One of them always did. It was he who bought me to join them, bought me with fifty thousand rubles, because I knew about guns. So I went, and then they would not let me go again. Then Kilgore came and we fought about the Russian girl, and when Kilgore beat me I did my best to betray him to Hat Shui——"

He trailed off into a confused babbling in a tongue that seemed to be Russian. But I sat there, a cold hand at the back of my soul. This man could be no other, was no other, than James Death!

Looking at him, I could not believe it possible. Those shaking fingers had not the force needful to drive home a knife. The face was that of a babbling fool. Yet—yet if this man were given opium and his brain lashed into action and all his vital forces stimulated——

"What's your name?" I demanded.

My voice must have frightened him. He rose and stood trembling.

"Be careful!" I went on, shaking the opium-box in my pocket. "Here's more hop, old man. Here's a full box of it, and I'll give it all to you later on. All of it! Sit down and tell me things, and I'll give it all to you. What's your name?

He was down again. No hophead could have resisted that lure.

"Death," he mumbled, his eyes darting all around. "James Death. But that isn't my name at all. I am a Russian, a gentleman, an engineer and a rich man! I will tell you how the Ten get their jewels, shall I? But give me more——"

"Nothing doing," I said, shoving away his hand. Already I was fearful lest the tiny bit

I had given him should start his brain working normally. "Tell me, first."

"All right. Everything they do is done by telepathy. Once a month the novices bring in the camels with the supplies and the ten fresh girls from Urga. They must be paid for. On the tenth day—everything goes by tens—comes a message from the Unseen One. They go out to the lake.

He babbled for a moment in his strange tongue. I sat there, absolutely astounded by what I was hearing. Then I recollected that the man might be lying. He might be repeating the wild legends which I had heard often.

"What lake?" I asked craftily. "The round lake where cliffs go down straight?"

He rose to the bait nobly, while his red-rimmed eyes shifted from side to side.

"No, no! The lake where they have purple mists with the odor of violets, which put men to sleep. The Ten go to sleep there. When they waken, they find the fishes singing to the dawn, and on the shore the jewels and gold. Give me more, more!"

I was so utterly taken aback that I gave him the other half-pellet.

Good Lord! This man was actually improving on the wild legend—singing fishes! That was something new.

"Fishes can't sing," I said. "It's impossible."

"They do. I've heard them," he mumbled away. "Kilgore is a scientist. He said that they have an arrangement of the gills that makes sound in the air. They leap from the water and sing. They are a distinct race. So are the men there, the Ten; they come from the tribe in the valley. It is between the Sayan and the Khangais ranges, at the headwaters of the Kem, and the city of whirling sands lies around the temple. I saw a palace come up out of the sand, but it was gone again next morning before Kilgore could explore."

"And Hat Shui?"

"He came to kill me because I had escaped," exclaimed Death with more animation. "I had been forced to enter the novitiate, you know, before Kilgore came. So Hat Shui came after me and ran me down. But I was too smart for him, too smart!" The old devil chuckled evilly. "I sent him to hell. And then I got a message from the Ten. They knew he was dead already, ten minutes afterward. They willed me——"

He broke off and said no word more. His eyes had ceased to rove about. This sign gave me some alarm because I knew his brain was at work now; the drug had reached the stomach. How I regretted giving even that tiny pill! Now my time was running short with him.

"Wait here," I said, seeing no sign of a policeman about. "I'll be back in a minute and give you the whole box of opium-pills. Just a minute."

He made no sign, but I saw his eyes fastened on me. Was it my imagination that told me there was recognition in those eyes, and the recrudescence of a terrible, dominant spirit? Was it imagination which showed new life flooding back into this old babbler?

I HURRIED away, cursing my folly. I went directly to the street, opposite the St. Francis, and paused at the corner. Looking back, I saw James Death sitting there exactly as I had left him.

Confident that he would not leave, I glanced around. Just across the street was an officer, swinging down toward the hotel. I hurried toward him, caught his eye and beckoned. He met me at the curb.

"Come over here with me," I commanded. "There's an old hophead sitting on the bench here who's been telling me about a murder he committed the other day. You'd better take him along and see——"

"You bet," said the policeman.

We recrossed the street and started down the path. A stab of dismay seized me. The bench was empty.

I swore and then darted forward at a run. James Death was not in sight. I stopped to question one or two loungers, who had seen nothing of the man. It seemed impossible that Death could have gotten out of there so quickly.

Gone he was, however, and the cop favored me with a fine suspicious scrutiny when we gave up the chase and separated.

How I cursed my folly. All the cards in my hand, and I had played them like an arrant fool!

I dropped on the nearest bench, feeling the ass that I was. James Death had not known me at all, had never guessed that I could be Day. Lack of opium had left him all unstrung, his brain a dazzled whirl of desire, his body a helpless wreck. He was mine for the taking in that moment, mine to bring before a police court; he would have confessed the whole business like a shot.

Instead of doing the obvious thing, I had sat there and chattered about the Ten Dromedaries, carried away by the things he mumbled in my ear. Now, too late, I realized that he had told the truth, and that Kilgore would have told me the same story had he been given time the previous evening.

The truth! I sat up, staring at the greenery with wide eyes. Then this place actually existed—was no figment of the imagination. This Death was a Russian, a man of education. The Ten had bought his services, and once at the lamasery he had been forced into its permanent service. A useful man, as his late actions bore witness. Then Kilgore had come, had found the place of legend. The Russian had fought with him over a girl, had joined him to betray him, had been finally beaten—and had got

away. After him had followed Hat Shui, one of the Ten, and Death had struck Hat Shui first.

And I had given this sodden wreck a taste of opium, enough to bring his poor brain back into coherence, enough to send him out with some vestige of himself at work. He would get more opium now, I knew. There was no lack of it around the city, in one form or another, and we could expect that within a few hours James Death would be equipped to work again. He was in telepathic communication with the Ten, for he had admitted as much.

Whither did this tend, anyway? I might laugh at telepathy, but I am no blind fool. I had either to accept or deny the whole story of the Ten Dromedaries, and I could not deny it. The proofs were too obvious. It was not for nothing that theosophy came out of the Gobi. It was not for nothing that Fandi Singh had warned me. It was not for nothing that Asian legends had now become flesh. And I had chucked the whole game in one moment's folly.

Well, the thing was done now, and no use crying over it. With an effort I forced myself to open the paper that was folded in my pocket, and I tried to read it. A fresh cigar between my teeth helped a little.

A good deal of time had elapsed, what with one thing and another, and it was now close upon noon. I read the paper idly, trying to keep my mind on the news-items. Presently I came to the shipping-page and folded the paper back with more interest. The shipping-news is the livest bit in the whole sheet, to my notion.

The *China Maru* had pulled out that morning for the Orient, and the column was headed with the usual gossipy account of her departure. I was scanning it carelessly, when from the list of more notable passengers rose out a name that hit me square between the eyes, like an electric shock. I goggled at the type dazedly through my new specs.

No doubt about it at all. Among the passengers who had boarded at the last moment was Sir Fandi Singh, G.C.S.I., C.I.E., etc. etc., Rajah of Bhapure, who was engaged upon a world-tour.

I lifted blank eyes and stared at nothing. That Sir Fandi had sailed the wording proved beyond question. He had said nothing of it the previous night. What was the answer? It came to me that there were two answers. First, the Rajput I had met was an arrant fraud, which I dismissed as impossible. Second, he and Kilgore and McAuliffe had skipped out in a hurry and left me to pay the shot; which I dismissed as equally impossible.

While I was thinking over these things in a dazed manner, I was idly aware that a man had come past me, had paused, and then had dropped down on the bench close at hand. For a moment I paid no heed, naturally; I was absorbed in the blow that had just landed, trying to figure something definite from the chaos.

Slowly I felt that a pair of keen eyes were watching me and a brain was centered upon me. The man sitting on the bench! Was it possible that James Death had come back? I turned my head and looked at the man and then I returned my gaze to the paper in my lap.

The man was one of the two detectives from whom I had escaped on the previous night, and he had either recognized me or was on the point of recognition!

VII

I SAT still wisely. A move to get away, and the dick would have grabbed me on suspicion. As yet, he was not certain of his recognition. Was it possible that the old bum I had sent out to my house had given in my description? No; most unlikely. It was much more probably the case that the two detectives who had seen me were now out on a general scour of the city, on the chance of finding me. And this chap had found me, but he wasn't sure of me at all. At this moment of crisis a tall figure striding along the path drew my glance. Kilgore!

I looked up, and my eyes widened for an instant. He caught the warning. How I blessed the man for what he did next! No hesitation, no false moves—but action.

He came to a dead stop before me and his hand shot out. When he spoke, his voice held none of the British accent. It was full of delighted surprize.

"Hello! If it isn't old John Barsley—here of all places! Why, man, I thought you were plugging away in a Chicago law-office! Why on earth didn't you let me know you were in town?"

"Well, well!" I came to my feet, standing slouched and round-shouldered, and altering my voice as I seized his hand. "Hello, old man. I only got out of the hospital yesterday."

"Hospital?" he queried. One would have sworn that the quick sympathy was genuine. "Where?"

"Here—the Mount Zion," I responded. "I came out last week on a case to get evidence—got appendicitis instead. They popped me off the train into the hospital. I just got out yesterday, but I'm still pretty weak. See here, I have rooms at the St. Francis. Come along and have a chat. I've been sunning myself, and——"

"Sure thing!" he exclaimed, eagerly passing his arm through mine. "Good Lord, man, you should have had them call me up."

We stepped away from there toward Post Street corner. When we were safely out of ear-shot, I gave Kilgore the reason.

"You slick devil, you! See if that chap on the bench is following us. One of the detectives at the house last night."

I could have sworn that Kilgore did not turn his head, and yet a moment later he made answer.

"He's lookin' after us. Now he's rising."

"Beat it into the hotel, then," I responded quickly. "He recognized me but wasn't quite sure. He'll come in to see if any John Barsley is registered."

"My car's by the Post Street entrance," said Kilgore. "Cheerio!"

We entered the hotel by the main entrance and a moment later came out the Post Street door. There was Sir Fandi Singh's big car, with red-headed Mac at the helm.

"Pull out!" snapped Kilgore as we climbed into the tonneau. "Quick! Out Sutter, through the park and to the Esplanade."

The engine hummed and we went away in a hurry. When we were heading out Sutter and were safely away from any pursuit, I broke silence—

"What's this I saw in the paper about Sir Fandi Singh leaving today on the *China Maru*?"

"He left," and Kilgore chuckled. "Said nothing of it last night? Just like the beggar! He's gone to make arrangements for us. We've decided to go too, in a couple of weeks or so. We'll meet him in Pekin."

"Where's Hat Shui?"

"He's put away under three foot o' sand," spoke up McAuliffe.

I drew a breath of relief. "Good! Then I've nothing to fear. But I've certainly played —— with things this morning, boys. You'll not forgive me——"

"Keep it until we can chin," said Kilgore. "We need all three heads."

That was sound enough, so I kept silent.

We droned along to Golden Gate Park, slowed down, and came at last to the far side. To the left we took the upper Esplanade drive, and Mac halted the car at a lonely spot along the ocean-shore. A fine crisp wind was breezing in and the surf booming grandly. Then Mac squared around and lighted a pipe, and we had it out. I told them all about meeting James Death and spared myself nothing.

"No use hunting excuses," I concluded. "It was a plain case of being a silly fool. Now the devil is at liberty, will be twice as cunning and slippery as before, and his brain will be clear enough to let him find some opium somewhere. Then—look out!"

"Aye," said Mac softly. "Oh, aye! You're richt. There's somethin' in that, as the thief said when he pit his haun' in the slop-jar."

Kilgore said nothing for a moment, but sat looking at the sea, a slight frown to his brows. Then his face cleared and a smile came to his lips as he brought his eyes to mine.

"Don't blame yourself, old chap," and the accent was on him now. "Little bit of a fluke, what? But no matter; carry on. Don't get the wind up at this stage of the game, old boy. I say, Mac! Is that Scotch in the car?"

"Aye! In the locker."

"Then suppose we forget the whole affair. Drive down the coast highway and we'll lunch at one of those road-houses, then return to the bungalow. Excellent chance to talk, eh? Quite so."

"Quite so, ye ruddy Britisher," returned Mac genially, and turned to his wheel.

"There's nothing to do then at present?" I asked as we started forward.

"Nothing," said Kilgore. "We must settle with James Death before we can leave, that's all. Never fear. He'll waste no time jumping us!"

WE HEADED south and were soon out of San Francisco. We halted at a roadside tavern, took a bottle of Scotch inside with us and made an excellent luncheon. After a drink or so our tongues loosened up, and between them, Kilgore and McAuliffe gave me the whole story.

Already I had learned enough to let me see through the chinks, but now I got it straight. This odd triumvirate was a result of the war. Mac, who was an American, had gone over with the Canadians and had run foul of Kilgore on the other side. Later they had encountered Sir Fandi Singh, who had brought a contingent of his own, and after peace came, the three of them joined forces.

Kilgore, I gathered, had no lack of money. Sir Fandi was of course rich—most native rajahs are millionaires several times over. McAuliffe was a machinist, while Kilgore was an inventor of sorts. The three had drifted, and finally dropped in for a visit at the lamasery of the Ten Dromedaries.

They must have had an exciting time of it over there. I shall not detail their story, except as it bears upon the present action. The lamasery, where the priests of the Ten lived, was some distance from the temple and the city of the whirling sands and the lake of legend; the three adventurers had come no closer than the lamasery. This was close enough, however.

Kilgore assured me that legend had not lied. Each month ten virgins were brought from Urga to the lamasery. He told what became of them at the end of the month, but that is another story. There was a Russian girl, and then there was James Death. The Russian girl had been killed and Death had first joined the three, then had betrayed them. At all events, they had managed to get away from the lamasery with whole skins and a sack of loot and nothing more. James Death had got clear also, no doubt with his own loot.

In the course of their association, Death had learned a good deal about the three, who had planned to return to the place in proper style. This brought up the question of why he had followed and spied upon them.

"Reason enough," said Kilgore. "We've been at work on a new sort of gun, and he wanted to get the details of it. When we get back to the bungalow you'll see for yourself. He knew, of course, that we were going back to the temple."

"Why?" I questioned. "What sane man would want to go back there?"

Kilgore gave me an eagle-sharp look. All the affected accent fell away from him.

"See here, Day! That place is a plague-sore on the face of the earth. We'll not argue the telepathic part of it; you must accept that as truth, and beware of it. But in a more concrete sense that place is damned. Every month ten girls from Urga—think of it! That's the thing, the whole thing, with us."

"Not the whole thing," put in Mac cannily. "Ye'll ken the hoard o' gowd and jewels that the Unseen One hauds!"

Kilgore brushed this aside with a gesture.

"Never mind. The main thing is that this place is a nest of devils. It's a peculiar race, Day, the mean between Russian and Chinese, Cossack and Mongol. Like the fish in that lake; Death brought me a specimen. A distinct species. Those fellows are beginning to touch the white races with their evil. That Russian girl was a sample. They keep in touch with the world outside; they are well armed and provided, and I've no doubt in the world that at this minute they know we are planning to come back. Don't you make any mistake about the telepathic stuff. It's dangerous."

"It's no skin off your nose how many girls they hook," I countered.

"Bah!" Kilgore looked at me, fire in his eyes. "We're men, aren't we? Gentlemen?"

"Not me," I said, pouring another drink. "I'm no gentlemen, thank Heaven! I'm just plain man. If I was a gentleman, I'd have been dead and overboard years ago——"

Kilgore laughed suddenly, and Mac uttered a cackle.

"Shut up, Day," snapped the tall one genially. "We understand each other. Well, the three of us are going to put that cursed breed out of business. The Chinese can't do it; they only make a pretense at authority. The lama at Urga—the Hutuktu, you know, who has a government of his own—is probably drawing down a bit of graft from the Ten himself. The Japs are pushing that way, but no sane man out there has any dealings with them.

"And, as Mac says, there is loot to be had. I have a notion that the Unseen One, as he is called, who appears to live at the lake, has a big stock of jewelry on hand and that it comes from some old hoard. If I told you that I thought it might be the tomb of Genghis Khan, you'd only laugh. If I told you who I thought Genghis Khan really was, you'd laugh."

"Oh," I put in, "I've heard that yarn, too. About his being a Jap prince."

Kilgore started, then broke into a laugh.

"Well, let it go. Now, Day, what do you say? Would you like to take a crack at the Ten Dromedaries with us?"

I stiffened with astonishment, until I saw that he really meant it. Mac was watching me, and nodded assent.

"Thank you, gentlemen," I said promptly, "but please count me out."

"If I ever sin again," quoted Mac wickedly, "the Guid Laird——"

"I meant it, too," I shot at him. "I don't want to go back to that accursed Gobi! The smell of a camel nauseates me. I will admit that the loot part of it is an appeal——"

"Well." Kilgore rose as he spoke, "suppose you go back to the bungalow with us and take a look at the machinery. We'll stick together until James Death is attended to, anyway; then settle affairs."

"Good enough," I agreed.

It was nearly three o'clock when we started home. It was four when we sighted the bungalow. My house appeared to be deserted, but I was not going to look and see just yet.

I don't think it occurred to any of us that in this interval of a few hours James Death might have had plenty of opportunity to get opium and plan things.

VIII

MAC ran the car in the drive, off the street toward the garage, and we alighted.

At this instant some realization of the time involved came to me. It was not yet twenty-four hours since I had come to know Kilgore and McAuliffe; only slightly over that since I had been at home. And yet in this one day volumes had happened. At my short laugh the others gave me a glance of inquiry.

"Time," I explained. "Yesterday I was an honest citizen. Today I'm in your company. Where's the weapon?"

They turned to the garage. Why do I mention this incident? Because I firmly believe Kilgore would have gone into the house except for it. And if he had gone into the house then, things would not have turned out the way they did.

"Did you see Fandi Singh off?" I asked.

Mac was unlocking the garage doors. Kilgore shook his head.

"No chance. He came out here this morning, left the car and taxied to the wharf. Why?"

"I was thinking that since the boat only left this morning, and the paper had been printed during the night, he——"

"Bright boy!" chuckled Kilgore. "Sure. He had passage long ahead."

"Oh! Then it wasn't yesterday that sent him kiting to China?"

"No. It was day before yesterday—in other words, our plans already made."

McAuliffe threw open the doors, and we stepped into the garage.

This was a fine roomy place with cement floor and was excellently adapted to its present use as a shop. Money had not been spared to fit it up, either. There was a lathe with a drill beside it, run by electricity, and a good many more tools. Not being much of a mechanic, I can not describe the place in detail.

The main point of interest, to me, was the gun. And with this, I must confess, I fell in love at the first sight.

My initial feeling was one of surprize. The gun was small, and an exclamation broke from me as I picked it up—the thing scarcely weighed fifteen pounds. The length was only a foot and a half.

"Why, this—this is a toy," I said.

"Think ye so?" McAuliffe chuckled proudly. "It's a verra deadly sort o' toy, then. Let me haver a bittie we' the lady, and I'll guarantee she'll aye speak to some purpose."

The gun was mounted on a quadrupod, two legs of which, I perceived, had grab-bands for weights of stone or other material. The legs, also, were telescopic, evidently for altitude, one pair being longer to offer a long recoil-base. With the machine lay its case, a stout leather affair twenty inches in length and five square, the shoulder-strap of which served when in action as a stirrup-strap for the feet of the operator, thus forming a strong resistance to the firing-throb.

Kilgore went over the thing and explained its weight, or rather its lack of weight.

"It's built of a special steel and aluminum alloy. Here, the housing shows how thin it can be, yet I defy you to crack it with a sledge. She's air-cooled.

"She'll need air, all right," I commented bluntly. "Fifty rounds, and this jigger will be red-hot and blowing up!"

Kilgore laughed.

"Think so? We tried her out two days ago, Day, on the shore. We timed a set-up to first shot and take-down and load. From cargo-pack to first shot was fifty-two seconds, and one minute twenty-five seconds from mounted to cargo again."

"Oh, there's no denying she's a very handy little thing, except for the heat——"

"And we fired five hundred rounds within the minute. The gun showed less heat than would a rifle after twenty rounds."

I whistled.

"But where's the hammer to your gun?"

"None. It's fired by electric battery. Now you have the advantage of cheapness, light weight and strength."

"But you have to carry a battery——"

"It weighs less than a single box of cartridges," and he touched a battery-case on the work-bench. "Day, don't you think the three of us would be fools to go up against the Gobi and that crowd of priests, with their tributary people, unless we'd tried and perfected this weapon? Of course.

"Fandi Singh has taken the plans with him. He'll arrange to make the Chinese Government a free gift of this weapon, you understand? In return, we have free access to the temple of the Ten Dromedaries and protection for all the loot we bring out. Incidentally we hope to get a good deal of scientific data, ethnic and so forth."

"Oh!" I said, wrinkling up my brows. "I smell a mouse in this free-gift business, old man! If the Chinese Republic had a few batteries of these guns scattered along the border, the little brown brothers would scarcely bother their sovereignty any more, eh?"

Mac grinned. Kilgore looked a bit confused.

"Oh, I say!" He attempted to protest, coloring a trifle. "You know, Japan is our ally. I mean, Great Britain's ally——"

I had him by this time, however.

"You're a hot conspirator, you are!" I told him cheerfully. "This is where you fall down, old Canuck, you bet! I'm on to the game, all right. Let's see, now. You've got a strong pull with the Chinese Republic, eh? And you're making this gun here in San Francisco, where the Six Companies and the Welfare Societies can keep watch of things and assure no interference from Japanese gentlemen. Oh, this thing brightens up amazingly! Then you go over to China and presently the Republic equips its army with some new weapons, and the next time Japan comes along with a big bluff—blooey! The bluff doesn't work. And Japan finds out why, and backs down. And China gains her own place among nations. And of course Great Britain knows nothing at all about it, nothing at all! But China will be properly grateful."

Mac broke into a peal of laughter and I was forced to grin a little myself at the confusion of Kilgore.

"Dash it!" he murmured. "I never said anything about that at all!"

"No need," I returned. "Craig Day can figure out two and two, occasionally! To carry the thing a bit farther, James Death knew something of your plans and kept an eye

on you. Why? Not because he was worried about the priests of the Ten Dromedaries—not much! He may be in communication with them, right enough, and probably is by his own account; but he's free of their power and intends to remain free. What's his one best bet, then? Why, simply to line up on this gun and interview one or two Japanese here in the city. Mac, get that bottle out of the car, will you? So much talking makes me dry."

McAuliffe went out to the car. Kilgore stood in frowning thought, staring down at the weapon. At length he roused.

"Day," he said slowly, "you're a shrewd man."

"I've been told so," was my dry comment. "Well?"

"I shan't affirm or deny what you've just stated. I've had nothing to say in the matter; it is formed entirely of your own conclusions. I will say, leaving my end of it entirely alone, that in your deductions as regards James Death you may have hit upon the truth."

He was picking his words carefully.

"In fact, if Death went to the Japs with what he knows about this gun, there's no telling where the thing might end."

"Then you don't admit that Death has been in Jap employ right along?"

"No—" he gave me a sharp look—"I don't. I admit nothing. I do think that he would not turn to the Japs until the last moment, until he was in desperate straits, until he was actually forced into it."

"Which probably happened this morning?" I queried.

"Exactly."

Mac came in with the bottle of Scotch in his hand and a doleful expression.

"Hardly one guid dram left," he mourned. "Not to mention a r-real drink all around!"

"There's another bottle in my trunk," said Kilgore, smiling at the expression. "Go in and get it, like a good chap. We've reached a point of celebration."

McAuliffe winked at me and then departed. I understood perfectly well. My deductions had been absolutely correct, but Kilgore would never admit the fact. When Mac was gone, I came back to the topic.

"What do you expect, then?"

"I hardly know."

He frowned and lighted a cigaret.

"Death is afraid of Japs; he hates them and despises them, like most Russians. I imagine he'd go to them and promise details later, if they'd give him opium. He'd tell enough to get them interested. Then he'd start out alone to get the details."

"From you?" I laughed scornfully. "Why, the man is a weak old fool! If you'd seen him this morning, you'd have said he was fit for an asylum. Physically and mentally gone."

"You failed to catch him, didn't you?" said Kilgore dryly. "With opium in him the man is superhuman. I tell you, look out for him! Mac and I know what to expect. We'll wait here and let him come—and finish him. That's our only chance."

We stood silent for a little. I was impressed by the conviction in Kilgore's manner. He meant his words absolutely.

And now the thing was broadening out. Yesterday it had been a feud. Last night it had become a world-hunt. Today it had developed into an international affair—just like that. If Kilgore got his gun into the hands of the Chinese—I mean the Shanghai government, you understand, and not the old fossils at Pekin—then the Japs were done for in China. There were forces behind Kilgore. I am not saying who; but it was not England's game to see Japan sweep the Chinese Republic out of existence. Not America's game either. Suddenly Kilgore uttered an exclamation:

"Mac can't find that bottle, I imagine. Come into the house, old man; or wait here until we get back, and I'll show you a few details about the gun. The telescopic legs lock with a split band and cam, for example." I nodded, and Kilgore left the garage. He did not return.

IX

I WAS leaning over the gun, examining it, when the interruption came.

"Hands up!" crackled a sharp voice behind me, followed by the click of a cocking hammer.

That voice spelled business, and so did the click. I wasted no time looking, but put up my hands. Then I glanced around, and judge of my amazement when the owner of that voice proved to be James Death!

He held a revolver in his hand, and the gun was steady as a rock. Now I saw how true was Kilgore's warning, for the man was not the same I had left that morning. No! The broken-down old derelict was gone completely. In his place stood a man, old certainly, but filled with a sparkling glow of evil power which made him a dominating personality. The slack features had become taut, cruel, purposeful. The bleary eyes had become keen and deadly.

"Keep your hands up."

With this, Death came toward me until he held the cocked revolver at my stomach and leered into my face. I was too paralyzed with astonishment to utter a word, as he took away my pistol.

"Turn your back."

I obeyed and felt the revolver shoved into my spine. Now came an order to put my hands behind me, which I did. A moment later a

cord passed about my wrists. With his one free hand the man tied me, and tied me securely. When his fingers clamped into my arm they were like steel points.

"Now march into the house."

At this, comprehension flooded upon me, and I uttered a choked oath. He understood, and I heard a chuckle sound from behind.

"Yes, I got them both. And I've got you. March!"

The ease of my capture, the scorn and disdain with which he treated me, was maddening, but that revolver-muzzle was very soothing to the excited brain. He felt in my pocket and drew out his own box of opium-pellets and chuckled again. Whether he remembered all that had passed that morning I can't say; but I imagine he did.

I hoped some one might see us leave the garage, but the street was empty as usual. We went up the front steps of the house, and I marched inside, as gentle as a sheep led to the slaughter. I could try no tricks with this fellow. The tone of his voice told me that much.

Passing into the dining-room, I saw first a bottle of Scotch on the table. Then I saw McAuliffe sitting in a chair, with his head drooling over the back and blood on his face. Opening a bottle of whisky is an absorbing task, naturally, and Death had caught him at it; caught him with a blow from the front sight of the revolver, I judged, for his scalp was cut and he was senseless. Death had tied him into the chair.

Then in the corner I saw Kilgore likewise tied into a chair, but unhurt. He had been trapped as I had been, and like me he had too much sense to get shot. Probably he had counted largely on me at the moment.

"You reckoned without your host," I said grimly. "Got me before I heard a thing."

Kilgore nodded. The revolver poked into my back again.

"Sit down with your hands over the back of your chair, your wrists behind it."

In two minutes he had me bound hard and fast.

There we sat, poor Mac with his bloody face and drooping head, Kilgore with his eyes very bright and keen, his face rather pale, and clumsy Craig Day; all of us helpless. James Death looked us over and popped a pellet of opium into his mouth. Then he grinned.

"Well, I've got you!"

"Where'd you get the hop?" I asked him casually. He broke into low laughter.

"Ah! I got it from friends. And I shall take your fine new gun back to those friends, Mr. Kilgore! They are expecting me. They tried to follow me here, but I shook them off. I want no interference, you see."

Kilgore's eyes went to me in a glance that was significant. He had guessed exactly what Death would do—had already done. Now he spoke. By the quiet level of his voice I knew that we were in a deadly situation, held by a man who was no better than a madman.

"You know that I am a man of my word, Death. Will any price tempt you to let us go and abandon your purpose? Name your figure. I will give it."

"Money? Bah! I need none." Death's voice held scorn.

I saw Kilgore settle back in his chair as if further argument were useless.

"Nothing can tempt me. I am going to get my orders from the Ten, you understand? I am going to bargain with them—your lives, for freedom from further pursuit, for pardon and grace. You will please not interrupt me, or I shall kill you at once."

So saying, the man drew up a chair to the table and sat down, laying the revolver out before him.

Now for what I am about to write, I pray your grace. You will not believe it. You will say that it was impossible. You will call it a trick of an opium-crazed brain, a madman's delusion. Conceded. Anything you like—but remember that this is my story; the story of what happened in that room.

"I am about to open communication with the Ten," said Death again. "Remember, please!"

His hand touched the revolver significantly and we saw that he meant his words.

I have always thought that the fellows who did this brainwork went into a savage concentration over it. Now, however, James Death did nothing of the sort. He stared at the mirror in the buffet, as if looking at something far away, and relaxed utterly in his chair. He untensed every muscle and sat motionless, absolutely at ease.

His face changed, very slowly and imperceptibly. He became totally absorbed in what he was doing. His eyes fixed into a glassy stare, and when I vainly tugged at my bonds he paid no attention whatever to me. But Kilgore gave me a startled glance and shook his head. I desisted.

Sweat came out on the face of Death, and his lips began to move. I could not follow his words, although I could hear them; they were in a strange tongue. But, all of a sudden, he broke into English. And now his voice was queer, not his own voice at all.

"I am standing before you," he said slowly, mumbling the words. That was all. Before whom? The Ten, I presume.

After this, his lips moved without sound. Was he really speaking in spirit with ten men on the other side of the world, ten men who sat in the temple of the Ten Dromedaries before that supernal pillar which upheld the ancient roof, and who answered his thought with theirs? I can not say. But I can avow that

the thing was ghastly to see. The sweat rolled down his face, even trickled into his open eyes, and the lids never moved. This proved that he was in some sort of trance, beyond question; the physical was subordinated completely. The sweat rolled into his eyes and rolled out again on his cheeks in large tears.

"Yes," he said suddenly. "I hear."

His eyes closed. Was he now receiving a message from those ten priests who threw their wills across the world through space to him? You may suit yourself. I believe, personally, that he was. I believe that he actually got their orders, made his bargain with them.

"Very well," he said again. "I will obey. I am satisfied."

His eyes remained closed for a time. How long had elapsed during all this I can not say. It must have been a considerable time, for I felt myself rather shaken by the tenseness of it when at last his eyes opened again.

This time they were sane and cruel and purposeful, as if he had wakened from a sleep. He wiped his brow with his hand, and his fingers were shaking; the man must have been far gone with the strain of the exertion. He took out a box of opium and shoved two pellets into his mouth. His face had become a ghastly livid hue.

Now he sat silent, his eyes watching us, waiting for the opium to work. Little by little, color crept back into his cheeks, and the tired lines of age faded out. From McAuliffe came a stir, a faint groan, then a relaxing into unconsciousness. James Death looked at him, grinned evilly and came to his feet.

"You will be interested in hearing what I have arranged," he said, addressing Kilgore. "The Ten have agreed that if I serve them to the extent of your deaths, no further pursuit shall be sent after me. So I have agreed to kill you. Perhaps you think I am lying? Then I will tell you that they revealed to me what had become of the body of Hat Shui. It was buried by you in the rough sands of the shore, a cable's length from the water!"

This gave me a startled twinge for a moment, but of course he might have deduced the disposition of the body. He picked up the revolver.

"There is no need of further talk," he said with a horrible simplicity. "I will shoot you and end it quickly. Will you go first or last, Mr. Kilgore?"

Kilgore, very pale, smiled slightly. "As you wish," he murmured.

"Better take me first," I struck in. "I'd like to get it over with, —— you!"

James Death looked at me and smiled assent. His smile was unearthly, terrible, cruel as sin itself. In his eyes there was only a pitiless certainty as he lifted the revolver and cocked it again. I have seen death and murder in many a man's eyes, but never in such cold and frightful eyes as those.

"Through the brain," he said, and threw up his hand.

Somehow I forced myself to keep my eyes open.

X

JAMES DEATH was in the very act of firing. I could see his finger tighten on the trigger, could see the white knuckle show—when something bobbed through the air and struck his revolver. The something was a gray traveling-cap.

The gun went off and I heard the bullet whistle past my ear and plop into the wall. Before me had appeared a vision, following the cap—the man who had flung it. That man was Fandi Singh.

For an instant I thought myself dreaming or mad, until the reality of the affair was bitterly impressed upon me. The Rajput had thrown his cap from the doorway, had spoiled the aim of the shot and then had leaped forward. Death whirled about and fired at him but missed. Then Fandi Singh had him.

"Well played!" came the voice of Kilgore, cool as though at a cricket-match. "Oh, well played, Rajput!"

The revolver went down to the floor, and I thought the affair over. But no.

Fandi Singh was a big man and powerful. None the less, James Death was animated by something more than human strength in that moment. Snarling, fighting like a wild animal, Death gave the Rajput blow for blow, grip for grip; neither of them knew anything about boxing, and the affair was one of utter brute-ferocity from start to finish.

The finish was delayed, also. To my horror, Death actually got the big Rajput to his knees, forced him down and back until I thought the man's back was breaking. Then, at the wrong instant, he loosened his grip to gouge for the eyes.

He missed the stroke, and Fandi Singh came up like a steel spring. Back and forth they reeled, one of them stamping on my foot and drawing a groan from me. That made me know the affair was real enough. The Rajput drove in hammer-blows that seemed to have no effect. Death hammered back at him.

Then in the midst of their struggle they both came down over the dining-room table. When they rose, Fandi Singh had the unopened whisky-bottle in his hand. Death pulled loose long enough to show the steel of a knife, but that knife never did him any good. There was a crash, and the acrid odor of raw Scotch filled the room. It was a man's blow, a fearful blow, and I did not need to look at the thing falling to the floor to know what had happened.

Panting, Fandi Singh stooped over, took the knife from Death's hand and cut us loose.

Our first thought was for McAuliffe. I held him, while Kilgore fed him a few drops of salvaged liquor. Presently his eyes opened and he groaned as I straightened him up. Then we had it out.

"Missed the confounded boat," said Fandi Singh, laughing happily, "and a good job I did, too! Five minutes too late. They would have taken me out in a launch to her, but I refused. Fate was in it.

"I came back to the square, meaning to wait there for Day to come. I got there in time to see his meeting with James Death, and I watched. When Death slipped away, I followed him. He went through the bushes to Post Street and got into a taxicab. So I hired another and away we went—straight out Post to the Japanese quarter.

"Then I knew what he was up to, and I came here. You were gone. I went over to Day's house, found it deserted except for an old man who said Day had paid him to——"

"Yes, yes," I broke in. "Go ahead. I hired him."

"I dismissed him," and the Rajput smiled. "Then I went to Death's room and settled down to watch this place. At three o'clock James Death came down the street, walking, alone. I was suspicious that Japs would come after him, so I waited. He went straight into the house as if knowing it to be empty. I had no arms of any sort, and I decided to await your return. When you came back, a man was walking down the street—a Jap. I stayed to watch him, but he went on and never looked back. Meantime, you had gone into the house. I saw Death and Day go in together, as I left Day's house. Unfortunately, there wasn't a gun in the garage, so I had to come in and do what I could."

"You took a devilish long time about it," I rejoined. "Feeling better, Mac? Look what your Rajput did to Death—brained him with that bottle of Scotch! This puts Mr. Death out of the game for keeps."

Mac felt his sore head, looked at the débris on the floor and groaned.

"Losh, what an awfu' waste o' good whusky!"

We all laughed at that, a little shakily, perhaps. Then Kilgore looked at me.

"Well, Day! The Japs have got word of this thing from Death. They know nothing definite but they suspect; they'll be after us, I imagine. Want to throw in with us and go to China?"

"Why the devil did you put it that way?" I grunted. "I don't, but I will. Not tomorrow, though; you fellows are too cursed hasty. I want a chance to see my mother."

Kilgore nodded. "All right. Tell you what. You sent her to a mountain hotel, didn't you? Well, go there yourself for a fortnight. Meet us at the China Mail dock three weeks from yesterday; there's a boat direct to Tientsin then. Look it up and meet us at the dock. We'll attend to everything, ticket and so forth. Suit you?"

"Can do," I replied. "What about this?" and I touched the body of Death with my foot.

"Let him go to join Hat Shui, the messenger of the Ten. We'll manage him."

Thus it was arranged. Kilgore also undertook to satisfy the police.

Tomorrow my period of rest and relaxation is up, and I am glad. Tomorrow I start back for the city, to meet my three friends at the China Mail boat. Not that I hanker for the Gobi, but I would hanker for hell with three such companions as those.

Besides, the monotony up here is deadly, and there is a fool woman who tries to make eyes at me. Aunt Nora told her I was an adventurer or something. So I'll be glad to get away for a bit and stretch my legs, even in the Gobi. To kill time, I've written down here just what happened over across the bay. You may not believe it, but I don't care about that. You can call me a liar when I'm in China, and you'll be safe enough.

If I meet up with the three, and we do make that temple of the Ten Dromedaries, and get back, then just wait! What kind of a liar will you call me then? Not much, I guess, for I'll be right here on the spot, and if there are any names called you'll hear from C. Day!

W'al salaam, as the Arabs say, there ends the matter!

THOUGH it should have appeared with his story "Heart of the Yankee," in an earlier issue, the following letter from Barry Scobee, who has another story in this issue, brings up an interesting point as to the Mexican attitude toward Gringos and especially toward the Texas Rangers:

Bellingham, Washington.

There's no special "inside" stuff in connection with my story, "Heart of the Yankee." I had been wanting to make a story about the "bonus hunter" of the Southwest country. There are such, some of them ready to take a big chance for a big find in the vacant land. Also it had been rolling around in my mind that scrap of knowledge most Texans—I'm not a Texan, however—will say is plumb branded—in fact, namely, that the Mexicans think Funston and Pershing drew out of Mexico because they got afraid of what the Mexican Government and the Mexican army were going to do to them. "The Gringos," thinks the Mexican peon in his naive way, "are afraid of us." (And in a heart-to-heart confession with himself, he will add, "It is a good thing the Texas ranger is between us and the *Americanos*." You see, the ignorant and easy going, and most of the time pretty good *hombre* south of the Rio Grande, thinks, or seems to, that the ranger is just a little bit different breed from the regular gringo. They stand in terror of the ranger.) So I put the two foregoing ideas together and made a story. I am fond of the characters in it because they are like a lot of men I know.—BARRY SCOBEE.

THE following suggestion from one of you is right in line with plans we've been turning over for several years. Our house does not publish books but we've been trying to work out a way of getting "Ask Adventure" material into book form for the benefit of our readers. Others of you have brought up the matter and some day, when the paper shortage is a thing of the past, transportation facilities have become dependable again and labor conditions have become stable, we expect to put it through.

Some book house ought to jump at the chance. There is not only a decided demand but those books would be unique in that they would have the *most perfect editing and compiling in the world*, for that work would not be done by editors but by *the buyers themselves*. I mean that the exact material is already selected and each bit of it labeled with its relative value and relative space needed simply by the number of questions that have called each particular bit into existence. If there were ten inquiries from readers calling for one answer and five hundred calling for another, it is easy to determine at once how much relative space in the book each should occupy. The actual inquiries from readers are an almost perfect index as to just what should go into a book and nearly all our "Ask Adventure" experts have for several years been saving their questions and answers with this end in view.

HOW many books should there be? How shall the material be divided into books? By district or by subject or by both or part one way and part the other? Bound in cloth or paper? What arrangement should be made with the book publisher? Turn the whole thing over to him and let him sell you the books direct, we carrying a list of them in "A. A."? The magazine is not looking for any large profits for itself in the matter, but our "A. A." experts should get some authors' profits from it. It's not so simple and easy as it looks, particularly the arranging with a book house, but it seems well worth doing.

Let's hear from you. We not only want advice but the more exactly we know what you want, the simpler it will be to work out the problem.

I AGREE with the Texas comrade, whose letter follows, as to "Camp-Fire," "Ask Adventure" and our other departments being at least the most distinctive part of our magazine. I know you, our readers, like the stories and, as against the stories of other magazines of our general type, I think we at least hold our own. But in "Camp-Fire," "Ask Adventure" and the other departments we have something no other magazine in the world has. "I always read 'Camp-Fire' first" is so usual an expression in your letters that it's become a matter to be expected. (And I never get tired of hearing it.) Luckily we can have both stories and departments, but I honestly believe that, if we had to have only one or the other, a readers' vote would be very strongly in favor of keeping the departments and letting the stories go.

Yet there would be many who wanted the

stories and very few who would vote to drop the stories if we didn't have to. And if we're going to have stories at all we have to have a considerable number of them to make it a story magazine, one that can hold its own or better with any of the others. So when it comes to dropping some of them each issue in order to give more space to the departments you have to do quite a little considering.

JUST the same, what we in the office are trying to do is to turn out just the kind of magazine you readers want. Which is not just philanthropy on our part, but plain business and hard common sense, though I guess you know, too, that we want to please you just because we want to.

If we could get a sufficiently heavy vote from you to be thoroughly representative of the wishes of all of you on whether to drop some stories out of each issue and take more space for the departments, we'd certainly adopt the course indicated by that vote. But there's one factor that makes me doubt the fairness of that vote. Maybe I'm wrong, but I have a hunch that if a man is a department fan at all he's likely to be a very rabid one; it gets him where he lives. While if he's a story fan, he may like the stories better than those of any other magazine, yet isn't so likely to get "het up" about it. That is, the department fan is more likely to take the trouble to send in his vote than is the story fan. There is also the point that many readers never write to any magazine about anything, though I'll tell the world there are fewer of them on our magazine than on any other I know. These, though they might have strong preferences, would not be heard from or represented in the voting.

I'd like to have a full vote from you. Or even a fairly full one. Maybe later we can print a blank form in the magazine that can be torn out and mailed in. Then we'd have a pretty good idea as to whether to cut down on stories and enlarge on departments. Will you be thinking it over?

Now for our Texas comrade and the matter of "Ask Adventure" books:

Burkburnett, Texas.

I would like to make a suggestion in regards to the Camp-Fire of *Adventure*. I have bought or secured every issue obtainable since volume one, number one, and it is my opinion that "Camp-Fire" and most of all the "Ask Adventure" section are the greatest drawing cards you have, not merely from an advertising and circulation point of view but from a matter of service.

I WOULD suggest that you obtain copies of all queries written in to the different departments together with the replies and what further information was vouchsafed by the editor. Have them bound with convenient references and indexed and sold at nominal price. They could either be put up in the form of pamphlets or separate countings or conditions or bound together in one large volume. To publish each and every one would of course cause a great amount of repetition and unnecessary printing besides robbing the volume of correctness and making the whole most uninteresting. This however, could be done away with by a little intelligent editing. You know that nearly every question asked can be and possibly has been answered in three or four different ways, by collecting all together it would be of more service to the readers and also relieve the editors from covering the some ground over and over again.

My idea would be to gather all information queries, etc., in one volume which could be bound well and cheaply. Then if necessary have separate pamphlets printed covering each country, section, or condition such as Eastern U. S., Western U. S., Gold mining, trapping, etc. Titles to be published in "Camp-Fire."

THOSE desiring information on a given subject could look up title in "Camp-Fire," send for whichever seem to apply and then, if further information is desired, could write in to editor. This would enable a man to get all information at once, give him a chance to look over other opportunities he perhaps hasn't thought of and would eliminate over half your correspondence.

The whole volume would be for those who do not know just what they want or are merely curious and interested in such matters.

I believe it would be well to enlarge "Ask Adventure" even at the expense of a story or two. Nine-tenths of the readers, I think, turn to this before looking at the rest of the book. Stories can be had anywhere, but this is something new and interesting.—C. P. THOMAS.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, A. W. Callisen stands up and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

Rosebank, Staten Island, N. Y.

It is hard to write about oneself—and then the very things one might tell would seem fulsome and simply bore one's audience. Yet I have had many real story-book adventures by sea and by land, belonged to the alpine club and did a lot of climbing, almost losing my life on a glacier, and a lot of similar stuff. I work it into my stories, but in my case it is truth not fiction.

But by far my most interesting experiences have been my friendships—in many instances very close ones—with interesting men. Roosevelt and I were boys together, my father's country place being at Oyster Bay. I know and have known intimately such men as Kipling, Lord Brice, Dean Howells, Peary, Stanley, von Helmholtz, John Bigelow and his son Poultney, John Hay, Fighting Bob Evans and a host of others. I know Oscar Strauss, Herbert Hoover and George Wickersham; I have known Grover Cleveland, and know Wilson and Taft.

MY PRELIMINARY bow before the Camp-Fire audience is a rather perturbed one, as to most I am an unknown quantity, for although the author of many stories short and long, they have usually been of a nature which unfitted them for this particular magazine.

I wish I could begin this narrative, as so many of my brothers of the quill have done, by tales of early struggles, poverty and ultimate triumph, but am obliged to confess that I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth (or at least a heavily plated one) my father being considered a rich man in his day. Thus I started in life with all the dreadful handicap this statement implies—believe me there is no heavier one—yet lacking every element of dramatic interest. We had a big town house with a lot of servants, a charming country place on Long Island, and frequently traveled to Europe and elsewhere. As a boy I was pretty well wrapped up in cotton and guarded at all points. I attended the best private school of my day, later entered college, and ultimately spent several years at a foreign university. On returning home I joined some good clubs, played polo and la crosse, and became an expert yachtsman. Had learned to shoot, ride and pull an oar as a kiddy.

My view of life was as false as possible, and I was about as fit to take care of myself if dumped into a cold, unsympathetic world as a callow sparrow three days old. Yet there must have been a latent sport somewhere deep down in my constitution, perhaps the heirloom of my maternal grandfather, a hardy old New York shipping merchant of the fast-sailing clipper period, for one day I grew tired of it all and announced to my father that I proposed to go to sea. He, being a sensible man, did not oppose me, and I shipped as foremast hand on a fine bark of 600 tons.

In this way I saw much of the world, and, what was far better, learned to view life from another angle and ceased to bow down to false gods. After my college days I made other voyages and the love of travel has remained with me ever since.

ABOUT this time I took a crack at politics in the old Twenty-second, the so-called silk stocking district, with Teddy Roosevelt, Douglas Robinson, Ernest Crosby and other young friends. We thought we could reform the universe, but found it a tough job. Still we did good work for six or seven years, showing plenty of enthusiasm and lots of good will, and we learned many useful lessons and another side of life. While still a young man my father did me the greatest possible service by losing his fortune, and I quickly came down to stern realities. I tried my hand at various occupations, taught school, for I had not alone received a good education but always had the knack of getting along with boys.

Finally I drifted into magazine work and in time became an editor, but some twelve years ago the lure of the land took possession of me, I bought a one-hundred-and-ten-acre farm in New Jersey and started to farm on a business basis, and I believe I am one of the few city-bred men that ever made a success of it.

AS FOR stories, I have written them ever since I was a kiddy, though with frequent interruptions. On my farm for instance I worked all Summer in the fields just like any other farm hand, but the long Winter afternoons were devoted to writing, and where else could one work under more congenial surroundings? The great log fire crackling on the hearth with five or six sleeping dogs for silent companionship and, without, the snow-clad fields, purple woodlands and distant hills kissed by the early Winter sunset. "The Worm that Turned," was written by this Winter fireside. I abandoned this wholesome life with a sigh to take up war work and now I ply my pen again, stories, scenarios, whatnot—am always at it.—A. W. CALLISEN.

NORDICS, racial deposits and survivals, blond beasts and Western China—something more in the discussion Harold Lamb and Major Quilty started. Our comrade needn't have apologized for his spelling. We're not holding any spelling-bee at Camp-Fire. I'm no great shakes as a speller myself, but we have a dictionary and I can generally fix the other fellow up if he happens to need it, though, even so, I slip a cog now and then. If you have something that will interest the rest of us, fire away. Forget about spelling and grammar and such. If there's any bunch in the world that won't judge a man by his "literary" attainments, it's this bunch at our Camp-Fire.

McGill, Nevada.

I have been watching your smoke quite a while now, but never could catch up with you till tonight. Your outfit looks good to me, and if none of you have any objections I would like to come in, and sit down by the fire, and listen to the yarns. And furthermore, if all present agree, I want to travel a ways along the trail in your company since we all seem to be headed in the same general direction.

NOW I shall not make a long story of the fires I built back behind along the trail—some of those old fires seemed to me at the time to cast their glow over the entire section, but I have since found out that the light was only reflected back to me from the granite walls of the narrow cañon through which I was passing when night overtook me. Be that as it may, those fires are dead and many winds have scattered their ashes.

I guess we have all camped at pretty much the same places, and drunk from the same springs and panned the same gulches, so it would ill beseem me, a stranger, basking in your warmth and listening to the strange tales of your many adventures by land and sea, to sit here and babble of the few commonplace experiences that have befallen me.

I JUST now overheard Harold Lamb and Major Quilty on the other side of the fire discussing the probability of the Nordic invaders who overran Western China between twelve hundred and six hundred years before Christ, having left descendants in that section who have retained the Nordic racial characteristics, light hair, blue eyes, and tall stature.

Now I haven't got Mr. Grant's book, "The Passing of the Great Race," to refer to at the present time and there is no public library at this place, but if I remember correctly, Mr. Grant tells us, and History and Tradition prove, that the Nordic race swept over Europe and Western Asia from their home in the North in wave after destructive wave, ravaging and destroying every people that dared oppose them.

THE Nordics founded kingdoms and empires from the Pillars of Hercules to the Red Sea. Waves of yellow-haired and blue eyed giants washed down through Turkestan and Persia and flowed

through the passes of the Hindu-Kush into India. Now, whenever the Nordics invaded a country and conquered it they forced their language and customs on the original inhabitants and always in a few generations, if there were no fresh infusion of Nordic blood, the people of the country—in whose veins flow quite as much Nordic blood as there is blood of the Alpine, Mediterranean, Mongolian or whatever race the conquered people originally belonged to—have again returned both physically and mentally to what the original inhabitants were before the invaders set foot in their country.

Madison Grant says: "The conquered breeds out the conquerer."

One might search through the width and breadth of many countries that the Nordics conquered and overran for centuries and the only way or reason you would have for thinking "The Blond Beast" had passed that way would be by the language and customs of the people.

SO IT seems to me, as I sit here by the fire (now I am free to admit that all I know on the subject is what I have read), that the chances would be pretty slim of finding any of the Nordics breeding true to type after being in contact with a people of such strong racial characteristics for so many centuries. For we know that the long-headed, dark skinned Mediteranean has always replaced him in a few generations wherever the climate is favorable for that race, even in the British Isles which heretofore have always been overwhelmingly Nordic; also the Alpine is encroaching on him everywhere in Central Europe.

Pardon my keeping you up so late. (And, Mr. Editor, I beg that you will overlook the fearful and wonderful way I have spelled some of my words.) I will bid you all good night.—HOMER CHALLENGER.

IT IS not his first story in this issue, but Charles T. Davis' letter introducing himself to Camp-Fire, as per our custom, came a little too late to appear in our Mid-September issue which contained "Tartarin of Trouble Creek." So here we meet him now:

Denver, Colorado.

I thank you sincerely for the invitation to draw up to the Camp-Fire, on the outskirts of which I have sat, as a reader, since the first blaze was started years ago. I feel that the position of listener best suits me, for, in view of the brave accounts I have heard around the fire, I can find no tales that could compete. Of myself, there is little of interest to write. I might even condense my autobiography to the extent that once was done in a census report: "Born—yes. Parents—Two. Business—Rotten."

More specifically, I was born in Dardanelle, Arkansas, an Arkansas River town under the shadow of a range of the Ozarks. Since then I have traveled more or less up and down the country and have been in, over or through practically all the ranges from the Alleghenies to the Rockies, inclusive.

I know my own Ozarks best—through fishing trips and other outings into their depths, and, as a reporter for the *Arkansas Gazette*, through assignments to cover revenue raids, etc. I might have had adventures on some of these expeditions, only they didn't advent. One time I went in with two machine-gun squads to break up an armed resistance to the draft which had resulted in two pitched battles with a sheriff's posse and the killing of a posseman. The punitive expedition was a ghastly nightmare of endless hiking and after a week of it the mountaineers surrendered without resistance. Another time I was "war correspondent" with a revenue raid in force, one of the most extensive ever staged in the mountains of the Southwest. Eleven men were arrested and brought out without the firing of a shot.

I lay claim to knowing something about conditions in the mountains, but I readily admit that I could not give anything like an authoritative character estimate of mountaineers as a genus, nor do I believe any one else can. I have found mountaineers individually quite as variant as city people, or Easterners, Westerners or Southerners. I believe I have taken occasion to refer to the hospitality of mountain folk in everything I ever wrote about them. I still believe this to be one of their salient characteristics—that welcome or aid awaits every inoffensive wayfarer wherever night or necessity overtakes him in the hills. And yet—last Summer my father and I loaded our tent, commissary, guns and fishing tackle on to a flivver and bored into the heart of the Arkansas Ozark foothills, twenty miles from anywhere. When we started home several days later the flivver refused to fliv, and, when all other first-aid measures failed, I crawled across a couple of mountains to where one of the native free-holders was plowing in his more or less vertical cornfield. Without the slightest question he left the plow in the furrow, and with the mules came to the rescue. After a short tug the flivver's heart action resumed, and the rescuer bade us a cordial god-speed. But the next time he came to town he presented my father with a bill for three dollars for "drayage."

Another special characteristic I have always noticed among mountain folk is not usually brought out in the average mountaineer story. It is a kindly, dry wit, and it is usually based on a keen and accurate observation and a quick sense of the ridiculous.

Concerning *Tartarin*, he is a composite character. I never knew him all in one piece, but various parts of him exist all the way from the Cumberlands to the Ozarks. I own a rifle which used to belong to the gun-loving part of him.—CHARLES T. DAVIS.

CONCERNING his story in this issue a word from Arthur O. Friel:

Brooklyn.

The test of the tucandeira which the American hero of this tale has to undergo is quite widespread among the tribes of the southern rivers tributary to the Amazon. Its details differ with different tribes, but its essentials are the same—the proving of manhood by enduring the torments of these huge ants, which have been kept for a time in fiber cylinders or hollow palm-logs, through which the victim has to pass his arms. Sometimes he also has to go to each hut and do a sort of clog-dance while being bitten, but I have dispensed with that in this instance as being unnecessary and also detracting somewhat from the dignity of the white man.—ARTHUR O. FRIEL.

SOMETHING about comrade Harriman's snake or one something like it. Can any of you identify it?

Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Referring to Mr. E. E. Harriman's account of seeing a small snake which struck with its tail, rather than whipping it, when pinned to the ground.

Last Summer on the Sauk River, Minn., I saw a snake of this description, about a foot long, very thin and of a dark blue hue on top. I remember the bottom to be more of a strawberry rather than copper color.

I killed him with a stick, so can not say whether he used his tail for striking, although his slender body writhed in a peculiar way. His general appearance and quickness made me cautious or might have studied him alive.

This is the only specimen I ever saw. Have asked several people about it, but no one seemed to know of such a snake or else made some reference to the time before July 1st, 1919.

A person will see many strange things in the woods, but this snake seemed out of place for this part of the country and that is what made me curious.—L. G. ZESBAUGH.

LOOKING AHEAD FOR DEMOCRACY

I BELIEVE in teaching our new immigrants Americanism. But it seems to me infinitely more important to teach Americanism—real democracy—to our native-born. On the whole, I'd say they need it more than do the immigrants, for all the native-born think they already understand it and most of them don't. We are poor citizens and worse teachers. On the other hand, the immigrant is generally ready to learn, if he doesn't know already.

But there is one thing about the immigrant that makes me fighting mad. He often complains and grumbles and vituperates and goes "agin the government" because he doesn't find America what he expected to find it. "Where are this, that and the other that I expected to find in America and don't? This is a rotten country and I've been deceived."

Quite likely he has. By steamship agents and such, but mostly by himself and especially through seeing others of his countrymen who have returned from America in prosperity.

WHAT makes me mad is that he expects us to give him something. He is angry if he doesn't get it promptly, too. But what had *he* intended giving to *us?* He comes, too often, in the conscious or unconscious attitude of a blood-sucker, a parasite, a taker but not a giver. He brings us, often a strong right arm or a good brain, but there's no gift about it. Yet he expects *us* to give *him* something for nothing and to begin doing it as soon as he arrives.

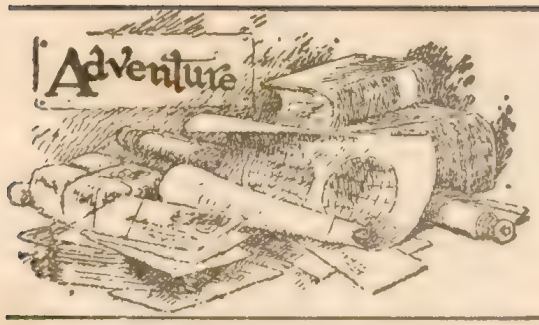
He complains about things as he finds them. Why, Immigrant, you are one of us now (or else a mere transient parasite who has no voice as to our affairs) and it is your job to buckle down and make things right. That is what citizenship is—the job of making public conditions right. Not with a bomb thrown at things your foreign brain doesn't yet fully understand, but by the daily striving to understand and to amend. This is *your* country now. What are *you* going to do for it?

I KNOW a Russian lady who came to this country quite a few years ago. I do not know whether she is a citizen. But she has been very bitter against America because it has not treated her as she expected it to treat her. How is she treating America? She says she brings us things we need. Quite likely we do. Immigrants bring us many things we need, intellectual and spiritual as well as material. But, so far as I can make out, what she brings us is chiefly a desire to make the American disposition and character the same as those of her former country. Maybe that would be a good thing, just as maybe it would be a good thing to make Americans out of her people. But that is rather beside the point. What does she bring us as a citizen, or as an individual dwelling among us and profiting at least enough from our institutions to make her stay here for years? At best she brings us a little uplift, leaving the rest of us to do the heavy lifting. Yet she has been very bitter against America for what *it* had not done for *her*. Writes glowing, intense things about it. Writes very well indeed, and spreads her bitterness quite a lot.

SHE is just one stray case out of millions, and not a typical one except in discontent about what immigrants get out of America and in failure to put enough into America.

These immigrants! Why, damn them, they are no better citizens than we are!

And that is why I believe in teaching immigrants Americanism and democracy but consider it infinitely more important to teach Americanism and democracy to our native-born.—A. S. H.



VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application*. We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying*.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL SELL: Sept., Dec., 1915. April, July, Sept., Dec., 1916. Feb., June. Aug., First and Mid-Sept., Oct., Nov., Dec., 1917. First and Mid-Jan., Feb., March, April, May, June, July, First Sept., Mid-Dec., 1918. First and Mid-Jan., Feb., First March, First and Mid-April, Mid-July, First and Mid-Sept., First Oct., Mid-Nov., First and Mid-Dec., 1919.—Address H. B. BOYER, Hartland, New Brunswick, Canada.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 519 Citizens Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliablity. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

2. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, Seattle Press Club, 1309 Fifth Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea; ships and men local to the Bristish Empire should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, freshwater pearls, herbs; and their markets.

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HAPSBURG LIEBE, 6 W. Concord Ave., Orlando, Florida. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging. lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine, Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

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JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel, *Especially* early history of Missouri Valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
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L. RY ST. JOHN, 1101 Kimball B'ld'g, Chicago, Ill. Covering Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Lake Michigan. Fishing, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, clamming, early history, legends.

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11. Western U. S. Part 2 and Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 20 Ashland Blvd., Chicago, Ill. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

12. Mexico Part 2 Southern
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure* magazine, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering that part of Mexico lying south of a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, commerce.

★(*Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached*)
Return postage not required from U. S. or Canadian soldiers, sailors or marines in service outside the U. S., its possessions, or Canada.

13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 1
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 2
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., covering southeastern Ontario and the lower Ottawa Valley. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping.

15. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

17. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

18. North American Snow Countries. Part 6
H. S. BELCHER, The Hudson's Bay Company, Ft. Alexander, Manitoba, Canada. Covering Manitoba, Saskatchewan, MacKenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

19. North American Snow Countries Part 7
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Richmond, Quebec. Covering New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper and wood-pulp industries, land grants, water-power.

20. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

21. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure* magazine, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

22. South America. Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure* magazine, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile; geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

23. South America Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Covering Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

24. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

25. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, Box 807A, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, N. M. Covering history, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, exports and imports, manufacturing.

26. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Maine. Covering Japan: Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

27. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing, explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

28. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

29. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

30. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

31. ★ Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, Care Society of Authors and Composers, Central Buildings, Tothill St., Westminster, London, England. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

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TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

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ALBERT GOLDIE, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shot-guns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shot-Guns (including foreign and American makes). J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S. its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

A Boost for British East Africa

MR. MILLER sees it as one bright spot on the Dark Continent—not forgetting that South Africa is some country too!

Question:—"I am writing to ask you some questions about Africa. They may be outside of your territory but there did not seem to be any one covering the exact things I want to know.

My father has an idea somewhat like the following: That he could go to Africa and fence in a large section of ground and get some tame cattle and put them in it. He understands that there are large herds of wild cattle there and thinks he might drive some of them inside of the fence. Feeding them a little at first and letting them run with the tame ones until they got at least as tame as the old Western herds used to be. Is this correct?

What kind of market would there be? If not a good one now is there any chance of it becoming better within the next few years?

What kind of climate do they have in the best section for this purpose? Where is this section? What kind of land laws do they have? What kind of laws regarding goods imported by settlers—guns, farm implements, trading-goods?

Is there any chance of operating a store somewhat on the same order of the plantation stores that operate in Mississippi? What would you handle?

Would you import your needs or can they be bought locally? Where would you buy them?

If the situation is satisfactory we might form a party to go there. One of at least four families.

About what would an undertaking like this cost?

How much land could a bunch like ours handle?

We have a pretty good knowledge of the various trades, especially farming, though at present we are all living in town.

We are not going there with the intention of working like slaves all of our lives for only a bare living. We don't object to working, but we want something for it. We are handy with firearms and know how to take care of ourselves in almost any kind of country. We have the following trades in the bunch: Farmer, storekeeper, electrician, blacksmith, railroader, mechanic and wireless operator."—J. T. SMITH, Dallas, Tex.

Answer, by Mr. Miller:—There is practically no opportunity in West Africa for the kind of undertaking you outline. There are quite large herds of partly tame cattle in the hinterlands, looked after by Bush Fulani, and they are developing cotton growing in Northern Nigeria, but mostly through large syndicates. This is not a white man's country. Whites can not stand more than two years of the climate in a dose.

British East Africa is your country. It is really a wonderful country, high, cool, good pasturage; and quite a few Englishmen of means have gone into cattle-raising there, shipping their cattle from Mozambique, I think. You want to write to the Oversea Settlement Office, 59, Victoria St., London, S. W. 1., England. They will furnish free all information about land-grants, labor conditions, etc. This country is developing, and those I have met from there are enthusiasts.

In general you have a very good idea—that of going in a bunch, all men of practical ideas, and you may count on the British government offering every facility, for such men are wanted.

It is best to buy locally, the coast trading-stores knowing the needs of the country and often selling cheaper than at home. But take along all the rough stuff you may happen to have in boots and clothes.

Having trades, you may be able to secure jobs whilst you look around. At least this can be done in East Africa, and unless the war has upset conditions it is the same in South Africa, but not in the West or the Congo.

In the libraries there are some very good books on the country, from which you could dig up a lot of useful information.

As to costs: I should say your party would want to land with a clear three thousand dollars, though you might rough it along on less. Steamship fares to the East Coast I can only guess at. But Thomas Cook & Son, 245 Broadway, New York, will quote you costs for your party and would, if you liked, book you—would perhaps get a special rate.

Fishing in Southern California

HERE'S hoping this inquirer has lifted many a rainbow trout before this gets into type:

Question:—"Am desirous of obtaining some information about fishing in California and Arizona. Also where can I get the best auto maps, etc.? I was born in New Bedford, Mass., and was brought up in a country where fishing was regarded as an industry as well as a recreation. I can also say that although I have been in quite a few American towns Tucson is the first place I ever visited where I was unable to procure fishing-tackle at the sporting-goods store. The creeks dry up here in the Summer, I guess, or else the streams have never been stocked.

Please suggest what line of tackle I will need for Roosevelt Dam and trout in California. Can I get by with two rods? I wish to travel light, and even to look at a sporting-goods catalog scares me. What grub will I need to take?"—BOB DAVIS, Tucson, Ariz.

Answer, by Mr. Thompson:—I advise you not to waste time fishing or buying tackle for "sometimes" Arizona waters. When you strike California you will be right in it.

When you go to California then you can be busy all the time, and I suggest you try the rainbow fishing close by San Bernardino. There Little and Big Bear lakes and the adjacent streams will fill the bill. Also write a letter to my friend Joe Welsh, Pasadena, Cal., and he will keep you in touch with all the best fishing, as he is always after trout.

Yes, you can get by with two rods, one 9½ foot about five ounces and one 8½ for small streams and an ounce lighter. Get good 6 and 9 ft. leaders, single-action reel, enamel line, if tapered the better. For flies, Cahill, Jock Scott, Professor, Queen of the Water, Lord Baltimore, Emerson Hough, any of the Palmers, Colonel Fuller, Yellow May, Silver Doctor is a choice that will kill. Small spinners are very effective in Western trout fishing, as well as the little Jamison Trout Wigglers for fly rod.

As for grub, bread and bacon are to be your stand-bys, and your tastes at each town will suggest

the balance better than I, as I know you won't forget the old life-savers, coffee, salt and pepper, which most fellows do.

Airguns and Freak Small Arms

MOST of us possibly are acquainted with the English airgun; but with the freak arms turned out in Europe in such numbers before the World War we may not be so familiar:

Question:—"I read a couple of stories recently in which there was mention of a compressed-air gun and a 'watch-pistol,' that is, a pistol made in the shape of a watch. Do such weapons really exist or are they just 'story stuff'?"—G. A. GRAHAM, San Francisco, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—I have used and shot "airguns," not the common spring gun with which Oliver shoots Mrs. Gilhooly's favorite tomato vines and pigeons. They are made by the Birmingham Small Arms Co., in Birmingham, England, and you can get a very complete list of them from that firm.

Pistols for use on the person are made in many forms, and while I have never seen a watch pistol, I have seen knife pistols, and know of some being made to resemble a fountain pen.

Put at least five cents postage on all letters addressed to Ask Adventure editors who live outside the U. S. Always enclose at least five cents in International Reply Coupons for answer.

Beriberi and Elephantiasis

WE MAY often sigh for the glamour of life in the far-off lands; and then is the time to reflect that people who live in more colorful climes are subject to diseases that we know not of. The law of compensation at work, probably:

Question:—"Would you kindly send me information as to elephantiasis, a disease which I hear is common in South America (Ecuador, Colombia) but which doctors in America, or rather New York, seem to know little about? The disease I mean attacks its victims first below the knees.

I would be greatly obliged if you could send me information as to cause, effect, and if possible cure of this disease, and whether it is catching.

If possible would you recommend some doctor who can treat same?"—H. W. WEINTRAUB, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—There are a couple of diseases which attack the legs below the knees. Beriberi attacks at first the lower legs. They become swollen and lose all elasticity. A finger may be pressed into the flesh and the sunken dent felt for several days or weeks. It is said to be caused from eating polished rice and starchy food. By experimenting they have found that rice hulls or husks which are taken from rice when it is polished if given in fair quantities, as bran is used, will absolutely cure this dreaded disease.

Elephantiasis is said to be caused from the bite of a certain small tropical gnat, or *sancudo*, and also from the so-called harmless breeds of mosquitoes (Culex). I believe they are not exactly certain what causes it. I have seen hundreds of cases of it; one case I remember was an old Ecuadorian whose lower legs were swollen as large as beer kegs and who was a repulsive sight to behold.

I think if you will write to the U. S. Government Hospital, Ancon, Canal Zone, Panama, they will be able to tell you of the treatment of this tropical disease.

Where the Cow-Puncher Stands Now

IS HE the rollicking, devil-may-care rough-rider of yore? Not as long as the supply of barbed wire holds out he isn't:

Question:—"I intend starting West soon to get, if possible, a job as a puncher on a cattle-ranch. Before taking this step, however, I'd like to get some advice from you concerning the matter.

To begin with, I'm 20 and have lived in the East all my life, although I've roughed it quite a bit and can ride and throw a rope after a fashion. I've spent two years in a big Eastern college and am just about tired of being hemmed in by houses, skyscrapers and dress suits. Here are the points on which I'd like your advice:

What are a greenhorn's chances of getting such a job; i. e., are men scarce out there?

In what part of your territory would I be most likely to strike something along this line?"—G. C. KELLOGG, New Haven, Conn.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—Don't. I will tell you why.

In the first place there is no scarcity of punchers in the cattle country. Second, as W. C. Tuttle said in my home last Friday evening:

"There is no romance in cow-punching. I tried it and know."

The cow business is now carried on largely by the aid of barbed wire. There are square miles of unfenced range, many of them, but the wire fence is used to such an extent that it has eliminated many punchers. The puncher of the novels and short stories is the exception rather than the rule. I know plenty of them who fit the story men to perfection, but they occur one or two in a place, mostly.

Do you know what your duties would be? Skinning dead critters, doctoring sick ones, treating live ones for screw-worms, ticks and a few such troubles, cutting and stacking hay, getting wood for the cook, building and repairing fences, etc. Riding in a flivver as often as on the hurricane deck of a cayuse.

Forty to sixty bucks a month and grub, with a chance to sleep in a bunkhouse with other punchers.

Anyhow no cattleman hires an Eastern tenderfoot unless he is as hard up for help as a Mexican dog is for hair. They hesitate like blazes about hiring a Western greenhorn; and an Eastern one——!

I can not tell you of any place where you would stand a decent show to get on as a cowhand. Arizona is a great stock State, but the closing down of many mines left a lot of men who knew punching as well as mining out in the cold, ready to grab off any punching job.

But you could get plenty of work at farming—Salt River Valley, Imperial, Coachella, San Joaquin,

Sacramento Valleys. Even in our own San Fernando Valley, close to this city. Also, men are always wanted in the lumber-camps up north—California, Oregon, Washington.

Waterproofing Water-Bags

HERE'S a good tip for thirsty souls in a desert land:

Question:—"How do you treat water-bags so they don't leak all water out in 30 minutes?

How do you test drinking-water to see if it has too much alkali to use?"—NORTH TOPEKA BIKE SHOP, North Topeka, Kansas.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—DEAR SHOP: There are several ways to treat water-bags to make them hold water. One is to soak them in melted paraffin and hang up to dry and get hard. Any water-bag made by a reputable firm will hold water without such treatment, if you keep it from touching other objects. I have made them from heavy canvas myself, and all the seepage of water was just what a man needs to keep the water cool. A paraffined bag will not seep, therefore will not keep water cool by evaporation.

I never used any other test for water than tasting it. My tongue told me instantly what I needed to know. If you wish other tests, better get some chemist to give you a formula.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

JOHNSON, LOUYS. Hungarian. Last heard of in Moline, Rock Island and Davenport. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write.—Address 500 West South St., Galesburg, Ill.

McAULEY, MARY. Married somewhere in the Carolinas and has near relatives in Australia. Relatives please write.—Address THE BRITISH CONSULATE, Savannah, Ga.

GISELER, BARNEY. Last heard of in Le Pedro, Cal. at the Delmar Hotel. Please write to your old pal.—Address FRED SPANGENBERG, 73 Allen St., Johnson City, N. Y.

EVERDING, ALFRED. Last heard of in Bronx, N. Y. Please write to your old pal.—Address FRED SPANGENBERG, 73 Allen St., Johnson City, N. Y.

DAVIS, SGT. WILLIAM. Last heard from at Fort Clark, Texas, Amb. Co. No. 7. Please write to your old pal.—Address PRIVATE FRANK J. LICHON, Post Hospital, Fort Crook, Nebr.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

AUSTIN, L. C. Please write to your mother. Something very important to communicate to you.—Address MRS. L. AUSTIN, 151 Schofield St., Jacksonville, Fla.

LINN, CYRUS H. Write your old friend.—Address JACK CAMPEN, care of American Consul, Ceiba, Spanish Honduras, C. A.

PHILLIPS, DUKE and KADDIE. Where are you? Last heard from on the U. S. S. *Gargona* Write to one of your old shipmates. Remember "Count O'Breins"? Any information will be appreciated.—Address A. LEBLANC, 249 East 25th St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

TURNER, WILLIAM. Age about sixteen. Left Elk City, Okla., for his home in Pensacola, Fla. in Winter of 1919. Write to your pal. Any information will be appreciated.—Address STONY STEPHENSON, Route 4, Elk City, Okla.

HALL, CHARLES and HENRIETTA. Parents. Last heard of in Boston. Mother's maiden name was Henrietta Bradley; home in St. John, N. B. Information as to their whereabouts sought by their daughter, Josephine, who was left in an orphan asylum and adopted by Mr. and Mrs. George W. Carson of Chicago.—Address MRS. CHAS. S. MACDONALD, 38 West 65th St., New York City.

WILL any one knowing parentage of baby girl taken by Sam and Annie Conroy of Cambridge St., Boston, Mass., around 1892, please send their name and address to L. T. No. 408, care of *Adventure.* Parents' name may be HAVEN.

ANY of the boys who served with me in D. 2. F. A. in the Philippines in 1911, please write.—Address HAMPTON J. FRAZIER, Box 193, Conway Pa.

BONNEY, ED. (Red). I have been trying to locate you since you left here. I have a good trail to follow. Write me.—FRANK CLEMENS, Gen., Del., Seattle, Wash.

MILLS, LYNDEN. Brother. Last heard from when working on coal-boat from Hoboken to Jersey City in January, 1906. Forty years of age, six feet tall, light complexion, blue eyes and light hair. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. ARTHUR BEARDSLEY, Lincklaen, N. Y., Chen. Co.

PERKINS, CHARLES. Native of New York State. Formerly with 6th and 8th U. S. Cavalry. In 6th Co. at Fort Slocum, 1917. Please let me know where you are.—Address A. WESCOTT, N. Castine, Me.

LAWTON, JAMES. Iron worker, lumber-jack, seaman, soldier. Born at Newport, R. I. Also lived in New York City, and San Francisco. Served in C. A. C. at Fort Schuyler, 1897. Later in Cuba and Philippines with Field Battery. Enlisted in B Battery, 21st W. Lancashire, Bde., R. F. A. Liverpool, May, 1915. Write your old pal.—Address A. WESCOTT, N. Castine, Me.

COOMBS, PEGGIE. Sister. Realizing my fatal mistake in blaming you for everything, and now at last seeing it all in the right light am very sorry and wish you would write me and let me know where you are.—Address TOM.

MORRA, WILLIAM. Last heard of at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Served in Ambulance Co. No. 5. at Texas City, Texas. Or any of the boys who served under Capt. Creighton or Lieut. Thode. Any information as to their whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address HENRY J. BUTLER. care of His Majesty's Army and Navy Veterans Association, Brantford, Ont., Canada.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

GARDNER, JAMES E. (Happy.) Last heard of in 9th Company Coast Artillery Corps, Fort Casey, Washington in 1919. Any one knowing his present whereabouts will do a great favor by communicating with H. J. B. care of *Adventure*.

THE following have been inquired for in either the First November or Mid-November issues of Adventure. They can get the name of inquirer from this magazine:

ANNA, M. W.; Barron, J. E.; Brown, Carl; Calamia, James A.; D'Errico, Louis; De Haven, Wm. Stringer; Fiedler, Joe; Gibbs; Hall, Florence (Maiden Name) Nutbrown or Baxter, Florence; Keney George A. alias Ryviers, George; Kennedy, Bill; Law, Merton Edward; Lyon, C. W. Jr. or Gladwyn; McDermott, Mrs. Chrystal (Maiden Name) Darnell, Chrystal; McDonough, Roderick; McWilliams, Walter; Murphy, Jesse T.; Myers James G.; Parker, Donald W.; Philpott, George Victor; Raymond and Eddie; Schultz, William "Gus"; Schwartz, Barney; Soontupe, Sam, (Eddie Haines); Staedtler, Emil; Vallen, Arthur; Van Save, Mamie; Vincent, Donald; Volkman, Charles G.; Wesner, Charles; alias Brown, Slovenian, Mandes A.; Zavisink, Frank; alias Charles.

MISCELLANEOUS Any one of the old 15th Sep. Batt. of the 5th Reg. U. S. Marines' Friends: Friends of Broadway Whitey: Members of two I. O. G. T. Lodges.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Ray Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; O. B. Franklin; Lieutenant Wm. S. Hilles; G. H. Bennett; Byron Chisholm; A. B. Paradis; E. E. S. Atkins; G. E. Hungerford; A. Gaylord, E. J. Moran; F. S. Emerson; E. Murphy; J. E. Warner; L. E. Patten; L. T. Bennett; Sinn Cardie; James Mosse; C. E. Wilson; R. W. Kimsen; C. H. Huntington; D. Polowe.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity:

BEATON, SGT. MAJOR G. M.; Benson, Edwin Worth; Bertsch, Elizabeth; Mrs. Brownell; Carpenter, Capt. Roberts S.; "Chink"; Coles, Bobby; Cook, Elliot D.; Cook, William N.; Cosby, Arthur F.; Crashley, Wm. T.; Eager, Paul Roman; Fairfax, Boyd; Fisher, Edward E.; Fisher, Sgt. R.; Garson, Ed.; Green, Billy; Green, W.; Hale, Robert E.; Harris, Walter J.; Hart, Jack; Harwood, J.; Hoffman, J. M.; Hughes, Frank E.; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Jackson, Robert R.; Kohlhammer, Jack; Kuckaby, William Francis; Kuhn, Edward; Kutcher, Sgt. Harry; Lafler, Mrs. Harry; Lancaster, C. E.; Larisey, Jack; Lauder, Harry; Lee, Dr. C.; Lee, Capt. Harry, A. R. C.; Lee, Dr. William R.; Lewis, Warburton; "Lonely Jock"; Lovett, Harold S.; McAdams, W. B.; MacDonald, Tony; Madsen, Sgt. E. E.; Nelson, Frank Lovell; O'Hara, Jack; Parker, G. A.; Parker, Dr. M.; Parrott, Pvt. D. C.; Phillips, Buffington; Phipps, Corbett C.; Pigeon, A. H.; Rich, Wagoner Bob; Rinkenback, Frank; Rundle, Merrill G.; Schmidt, G.; Scott, Pvt. James F.; Swan, George L.; Tripp, Edward N.; Van Tyler, Chester; Von Gelucke, Byron; Ward, Frank B.; Wheeler, S. H.; Williams, W. P.; J. C. H.; L. T. 348; S 177284; 439; WS-XV.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address L. B. BARRETTO, care of *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MID-DECEMBER ISSUE

In addition to the complete novel mentioned on the second contents page, the following stories come to you with the next issue:

JASTROW — *By Ramsey Benson*
The secret of the storm.

VENGEANCE — *By Clarence Parker*
In the land of the cliff-dwellers white men learn how the Indian repays.

A LITTLE HELP FOR HAWKINS — *By W. C. Tuttle*
Hawkins' friends try to corral a fortune with dire results.

THE MAN WHO COULD READ STATIC — *By Kenneth Gilbert*
Receives a mystery message from the clouds.

MAGIC — *By R. T. M. Scott*
Two tricksters meet in India and one is outwitted.

THE SUN-GOD TRAIL — *By Edgar Young*
The wisdom of the Inca.

FATE'S INSTRUMENT — *By L. Patrick Greene*
He is *Cagn* the bushman.

A SCOUT FOR VIRGINIA Part II — *By Hugh Pendexter*
Basdell Morris faces danger in the Colonial wilderness.

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Address.....

Town.....*State*.....

FF-3

If you have lived in a small town you already know these two—Mary Bishop, who has never done anything but just be married, and old Doc Bellamy, who refuses to change his top buggy and salt-and-pepper mare for a flivver.

You Lovers of Fiction—

Here's a new one, a story you will read with a new keenness of delight! You have, of course, heard about Nalbro Bartley—nearly everybody is talking about her. She wrote "A Woman's Woman," "The Gorgeous Girl," etc. Now comes her latest—the first of a series of short stories—

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Everybody's Magazine